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LYRICAL POEMS

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LYRICAL POEMS

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN

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DEDICATION

TO LADY WINDSOR

I

Where violets blue to olives gray
From furrows brown lift laughing eyes,
And silvery Mensola sings its way
Through terraced slopes, nor seeks to stay,
But onward and downward leaps and flies ;

II

Where vines, just newly burgeoned, link
Their hands to join the dance of Spring,
Green lizards glisten from cleft and chink,
And almond blossoms rosy pink
Cluster and perch, ere taking wing ;

III

Where over strips of emerald wheat
Glimmer red peach and snowy pear,
And nightingales all day long repeat
Their love-song, not less glad than sweet,
They chant in sorrow and gloom elsewhere ;

IV

Where, as the mid-day belfries peal,
The peasant halts beside his steer,
And, while he muncheth his homely meal,
The swelling tulips blush to feel
The amorous currents of the year ;

V

Where purple iris-banners scale
Defending wall and crumbling ledge,
And virgin windflowers, lithe and frail,
Now mantling red, now trembling pale,
Peep out from furrow and hide in hedge ;

VI

Where with loud song the labourer tells
His love to maiden loitering nigh,
And in the fig-tree's wakening cells
The honeyed sweetness swarms and swells,
And mountains prop the spacious sky ;

VII

Where April-daring roses blow
From sunny wall and sheltered bower,
And Arno flushes with melted snow,
And Florence glittering down below
Peoples the air with dome and tower ;—

VIII

How sweet, when vernal thoughts once more
Uncoil them in one's veins, and urge
My feet to fly, my wings to soar,
And, hastening downward to the shore,
I spurn the sand and skim the surge,

IX

And, never lingering by the way,
But hastening on past candid lakes,
Mysterious mountains grim and gray,
Past pine woods dark, and bounding spray
White as its far-off parent flakes ;

X

And thence from Alp's unfurrowed snow,
By Apennine's relenting slope,
Zigzagging downward smooth and slow
To where, all flushed with the morning glow,
Valdarno keeps its pledge with hope ;

XI

And then,—the end, the longed-for end !
Climbing the hill I oft have clomb,
Down which Mugello's waters wend,
Again, dear hospitable friend,
To find You in your Tuscan home.

XII

You, with your kind lord, standing there,
Crowning the morn with youth and grace,
And radiant smiles that reach me ere
Our hands can touch, and Florence fair
Seems fairer in your comely face.

XIII

Behind you, Phyllis, mother's pet,
Your gift unto the Future, stands,
Dimpling your skirt, uncertain yet
If she recalls or I forget,
With violets fresh in both her hands.

XIV

And next, his eyes and cheeks aflame,
See Other with his sword arrive;
Other, who thus recalls the name,
May he some day renew the fame
And feats, who boasts the blood, of Clive.[1]

XV

How sweet! how fair! From vale to crest,
Come wafts of song and waves of scent,
Whose sensuous beauty in the breast
Might haply breed a vague unrest,
Did not your presence bring content.

[1] *Fifth in male descent from the Founder of our Indian Empire.*

XVI

For you, not tender more than true,
Blend Northern worth with Southern grace;
And sure Boccaccio never drew
A being so designed as you
To be the Genius of the place.

XVII

But whether among Tuscan flowers
You dwell, fair English flower, or where
Saint Fagan lifts its feudal towers,
Or Hewell from ancestral bowers
Riseth afresh, and yet more fair;

XVIII

Still may your portals, eve or morn,
Fly open when they hear his name,
Who, though indeed he would not scorn
Welcome from distant days unborn,
Prizes your friendship more than fame.

A BIRTHDAY

I

I LOVE to think, when first I woke
Into this wondrous world,
The leaves were fresh on elm and oak,
And hawthorns laced and pearled.

II

The earliest sound that greeted me,
Was the ousel's ringing tone;
The earliest sight, lambs frisking free
Round barked oaks newly thrown.

III

The gray-green elder whitened slow
As in my crib I slept;
And merles to wonder stilled my woe,
When I awoke and wept.

IV

When held up to the window pane,
  What fixed my baby stare?
The glory of the glittering rain,
  And newness everywhere.

V

The doe was followed by her fawn;
  The swan built in the reeds:
A something whitened all the lawn,
  And yellowed all the meads.

VI

And thus it must have been I gained
  The vernal need to sing,
And, while a suckling, blindly drained
  The instinct of the Spring.

VII

The cuckoo taught me how to laugh,
  The nightingale to mourn:
The poet is half grief, and half
  The soul of mirth and scorn.

VIII

My lullaby, the bees astir
  Wherever sweetness dwells;
The dogwood and laburnum were
  My coral and my bells.

IX

My virgin sense of sound was steeped
 In the music of young streams;
And roses through the casement peeped,
 And scented all my dreams.

X

And so it is that still to-day
 I cannot choose but sing,
Remain a foster-child of May,
 And a suckling of the Spring:

XI

That to Nurse-Nature's voice and touch
 I shape my babbling speech,
And still stretch feeble hands to clutch
 Something beyond my reach:

XII

That in my song you catch at times
 Note sweeter far than mine,
And in the tangle of my rhymes
 Can scent the eglantine;

XIII

That though my verse but roam the air
 And murmur in the trees,
You may discern a purpose there,
 As in music of the bees.

XIV

Hence too it is, from wintry tomb
   When earth revives, and when
A quickening comes to Nature's womb,
   That I am born again.

XV

I feel no more the snow of years;
   Sap mounts, and pulses bound;
My eyes are filled with happy tears,
   My ears with happy sound.

XVI

Anew I listen to the low
   Fond cooing of the dove,
And smile unto myself to know
   I still am loved and love.

XVII

My manhood keeps the dew of morn,
   And what I have I give;
Being right glad that I was born,
   And thankful that I live.

May 30, 1884.

PRIMROSES

I

Latest, earliest of the year,
Primroses that still were here,
Snugly nestling round the boles
Of the cut-down chestnut poles,
When December's tottering tread
Rustled 'mong the deep leaves dead,
And with confident young faces
Peeped from out the sheltered places
When pale January lay
In its cradle day by day,
Dead or living, hard to say;
Now that mid-March blows and blusters,
Out you steal in tufts and clusters,
Making leafless lane and wood
Vernal with your hardihood.
Other lovely things are rare,
You are prodigal as fair.
First you come by ones and ones,
Lastly in battalions,

Skirmish along hedge and bank,
Turn old Winter's wavering flank,
Round his flying footsteps hover,
Seize on hollow, ridge, and cover,
Leave nor slope nor hill unharried,
Till, his snowy trenches carried,
O'er his sepulchre you laugh,
Winter's joyous epitaph.

II

This, too, be your glory great,
Primroses, you do not wait,
As the other flowers do,
For the Spring to smile on you,
But with coming are content,
Asking no encouragement.
Ere the hardy crocus cleaves
Sunny border 'neath the eaves,
Ere the thrush his song rehearse,
Sweeter than all poets' verse,
Ere the early bleating lambs
Cling like shadows to their dams,
Ere the blackthorn breaks to white,
Snowy-hooded anchorite;
Out from every hedge you look,
You are bright by every brook,
Wearing for your sole defence
Fearlessness of innocence.
While the daffodils still waver,

Ere the jonquil gets its savour,
While the linnets yet but pair,
You are fledged, and everywhere.
Nought can daunt you, nought distress,
Neither cold nor sunlessness.
You, when Lent sleet flies apace,
Look the tempest in the face;
As descend the flakes more slow,
From your eyelids shake the snow,
And when all the clouds have flown,
Meet the sun's smile with your own.
Nothing ever makes you less
Gracious to ungraciousness.
March may bluster up and down,
Pettish April sulk and frown;
Closer to their skirts you cling,
Coaxing Winter to be Spring.

III

Then when your sweet task is done,
And the wild-flowers, one by one,
Here, there, everywhere do blow,
Primroses, you haste to go,
Satisfied with what you bring,
Fading morning-stars of Spring.
You have brightened doubtful days,
You have sweetened long delays,
Fooling our enchanted reason
To miscalculate the season.

But when doubt and fear are fled,
When the kine leave wintry shed,
And 'mid grasses green and tall
Find their fodder, make their stall;
When the wintering swallow flies
Homeward back from southern skies,
To the dear old cottage thatch
Where it loves to build and hatch,
That its young may understand,
Nor forget, this English land;
When the cuckoo, mocking rover,
Laughs that April loves are over;
When the hawthorn, all ablow,
Mimics the defeated snow;
Then you give one last look round,
Stir the sleepers underground,
Call the campion to awake,
Tell the speedwell courage take,
Bid the eyebright have no fear,
Whisper in the bluebell's ear
Time has come for it to flood
With its blue waves all the wood,
Mind the stichwort of its pledge
To replace you in the hedge,
Bid the ladysmocks good-bye,
Close your bonnie lids and die;
And, without one look of blame,
Go as gently as you came.

A DEFENCE OF ENGLISH SPRING

THAT is the artificial springtide of our imitative Northern poets. Strange that till the present century hardly any English versifier—save Shakespeare, in a stray note or two—ever ventured to put on paper the real features of our warping English March or of our fickle English April. The calendar of our poets, especially as regards spring, is borrowed, or was borrowed till the end of the eighteenth century, not from the daily reports of the Meteorological Office—pardon the obvious anachronism—but from the "classical" calendar of Virgil and Theocritus. Stranger still that the absurd defiance of plain observation thus introduced should have infected even the vocabulary and the stock phrases of everyday life, so that we talk to-day of a "perpetual spring" as the ideal of a perfect climate: whereas if we ever thought of what we were saying (which we don't do) we would certainly talk instead of a perpetual summer. The common expression is correct enough in the mouth of a South European, for whom spring is the delightful middle breathing space between the draughty chilliness of open winter and the sweltering aridity of high August noontide; but it is simply ridiculous on the alien lips of the remote Hyperborean Briton. Nobody who took his language and his ideas direct from nature could ever dream of holding up as the model of a delicious climate that alternation of swirling, dusty nor'-easters and boisterous, drenching sou'-westers which we in England recognise as spring.—*Extract from an Evening Paper*, April 5, 1883.

UNNAMED, unknown, but surely bred
Where Thames, once silver, now runs lead,

Whose journeys daily ebb and flow
'Twixt Tyburn and the bells of Bow,
You late in learnëd prose have told
How, for the happy bards of old,
Spring burst upon Sicilian seas,
Or blossomed in the Cyclades,
But never yet hath deigned to smile
On poets of this shivering isle,
Who, when to vernal strains they melt,
Discourse of joys they never felt,
And, pilfering from each other's page,
Pass on the lie from age to age.

Well, now in turn give ear to me,
Who, with your leave, friend, claim to be,
Degenerate, but withal allied,
At least on mother Nature's side,
To Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, all,
Foremost or hindmost, great or small,
My kindred, and whose numbers ring
With woodnotes of the English Spring:
Leave for awhile your polished town,
Unto my rural home come down,
Where you shall find such bed and board
As rude bucolic roofs afford,
And judge, with your own ear and eye,
If Spring exists, or poets lie.

Welcome! Now plunge at once with me
Into the nearest copse you see.

The boles are brown, the branches gray,
Yet green buds live on every spray.
But 'tis the ground most wins your gaze,
And makes you question, with amaze,
What these are! Shells flung far and wide
By Winter's now fast-ebbing tide,
In language called, for him who sees
But grossly, wood-anemones.
Those, too? Nay, pluck not. You will find
That they maintain a silent mind.
You do not understand? I meant
They will not talk to you in scent.
Sweet violets you know; but these
Have their own rustic way to please.
Their charm is in their look, their free
Unfrightened gaze of gaiety.
Are they not everywhere? Their eyes
Glance up to the cerulean skies,
And challenge them to match the glow
Of their own bluer heaven below.
Anon the trunks and boughs fall back,
And along winding track on track,
Lo! wheresoe'er you onward press,
Shine milky ways of primroses;
So thick, there are, when these have birth,
Far fewer stars in heaven than earth.
You know them, for their face one meets
Still smiling in your London streets;
And one I loved, but who with Fame
Sleeps quiet now, hath made their name,

Even for those, alas! who share
No fellowship with woodlands fair,
Wherever English speech is heard,
A meaning sound, a grateful word.
Yet unto me they seem, when there,
Like young things that should be elsewhere,
In lanes, in dells, in rustic air.
But looked on here, where they have space
To peep from every sheltered place,
Their simple, open faces seem—
Or doth again a poet dream?—
The wondering soul of child-like Spring,
Inquisitive of everything.

Now frowns the sky, the air bites bleak,
The young boughs rock, the old trunks creak,
And fast before the following gale
Come slanting drops, then slashing hail,
As keen as sword, as thick as shot.
Nay, do not cower, but heed them not!
For these one neither flies nor stirs;
They are but April skirmishers,
Thrown out to cover the advance
Of gleaming spear and glittering lance,
With which the sunshine scours amain
Heaven, earth, and air, and routs the rain.
See how the sparkling branches sway,
And, laughing, shake the drops away,
While, glimmering through, the meads beyond
Are emerald and diamond.

And hark! behind baptismal shower,
Whose drops, new-poured on leaf and flower,
Unto their infant faces cling,
The cuckoo, sponsor of the Spring,
Breaks in, and strives, with loud acclaim,
To christen it with his own name.
Now he begins, he will not cease,
Nor leave the woodlands any peace,
That have to listen all day long
To him reciting his one song.
And oft you may, when all is still,
And night lies smooth on vale and hill,
Hear him call "Cuckoo!" in his dream,
Still haunted by the egoist theme.

Out of the wood now, and we gain,
The freedom of the winding lane:
Push through the open gap, and leap;
What! have you tumbled all aheap?
Only a scratch. See! ditch and bank
With the same flowers are lush and rank,
With more beside. As yet but single,
The bluebells with the grasses mingle;
But soon their azure will be scrolled
Upon the primrose cloth-of-gold.
Yes, those are early ladysmocks,
The children crumple in their frocks,
And carry many a zigzag mile,
O'er meadow, footpath, gate, and stile,
To stick in pots and jugs to dress

Their cottage sills and lattices.
As yet they only fleck the grass;
But again hither shortly pass,
And with them knolls that now are bare
Will be a blaze of lavender.
What lends yon dingle such a sheen?
How! Buttercups? No, celandine.
Complete in its own self, each one
A looking-glass is for the sun,
Soon as his waking hours begin,
To see his own effulgence in.
Crave you for brighter still, behold
Yon clusters of marsh-marigold.
This is our rustic wealth, and found
Not under, but above the ground;
Mines that bring wealth without its sting,
Enrich without impoverishing.

Yes, Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo, still!
Do you not feel an impulse thrill
Your vernal blood to do the same,
And, boylike, shout him back his name?
But though he loudest, longest sings,
Music is shook from myriad wings.
Hear you the lark advancing now,
Through seas of air, with rippling prow?
They say that from the poet's tears
Spring sweetest songs for unseen ears;
And, from its moist and lowly bed,
The lark mounts up aloft to shed,

In heavenly fields beyond our view,
Music still drenched with earthly dew.
The robin, that in winter cheers
With his lone voice our lonelier ears,
Though warbling still on neighbouring bough,
Sings all unheard, unnoticed now.
Chatter the jays, the starlings flute,
There's not a single throat that's mute.
From tree to tree the finches flit,
Nor once their carols intermit.
The willow-warbler mounts, then drops,
And in his silvery solo stops
Just as it bubbles to the brim,
To hark if any answer him.
High on a bare conspicuous spray,
That none may doubt who chants the lay,
Proud of his undisputed skill
To breast whatever note he will,
The thrush runs revelling all along
The spacious gamut of his song;
Varies, inverts, repeats the strain,
Then sings it different again.
The blackbird, less expert than he,
Coaxes and scolds alternately;
Then, with a sudden scream and rush,
Is off into another bush,
Feigning to fear for life and limb,
Though none have interfered with him.
But listen! ne'er on urban bough
Was perched the note you caught just now.

Hush! move a little down the lane;
When we have passed, he'll start again.
There! Did you ever hear a strain
Of such apotheosized pain,
Such sadness almost sung to bliss,
Blending of woe and joy like this?
Yes, he descants all day, despite
The name he borrows from the night.
Though then perchance the wails increase,
When doth true anguish ever cease?
He is the poet-bird that sings
Through joy, through sorrow, through all things.
'Tis only we that do not hark
Until our own bright days grow dark.

Now, think you that I gleaned all this,
This mite of wisdom, wealth of bliss,
In dusty shelf and yellowing tome?
Is it not rather that I roam,
From dawn to noon, from noon till eve,
Ready to gladden or to grieve
With every aspect, impulse, mood,
Of Nature's active solitude?
Ah! if you knew the hours on hours
One lives with birds, one spends with flowers;
How many a time one's eyes grow wet
By gazing on the violet;
How often all one has to show
For days that come, and days that go,
Are woodland nosegays all ablow;

You then, I think, would scarcely deem
One's songs of Spring a borrowed theme,
But own that English poets learn,
In every hour, at every turn,
From Nature's page, from Nature's speech,
What neither book nor bard can teach.
Nor deem this pride. I am to her
A student and interpreter,
Loving to read what lessons lurk
In her unlettered handiwork,
To find the helpful meanings writ
In waves that break, in clouds that flit,
Some balm extract for weeping eyes
From rain that falls, from dew that dries;
Infer from her uncertain text
A hopeful creed for souls perplexed,
To them her busy calm impart,
And harmonise the human heart.

Halt we a little here, and gaze.
Gambol the lambs, their mothers graze,
While cloudland shadows o'er the grass
In noiseless billows break and pass.
Beholding these, would you not say
The world was born but yesterday?
And while the years such scenes unfold
Afresh, it never can grow old.
Yon yeanlings, by their dam's warm fleece,
Fixed image of ephemeral peace,
How cunningly and snug they cower

From driving gust and drenching shower.
One symbol more, for me at least,
Who, let the world blow north or east,
By mother Nature once reclined,
Am sheltered from each bitter wind.

Yet deeper lessons may we read
In this unacademic mead:
The wisdom of untutored sense,
Sagacity of reverence.
See! the lambs kneel, that they may drain
From life's sweet source a deeper strain.
And if from Nature's lavish breast
We would imbibe the fullest, best,
All that she is so prompt to give,
That we may learn, that we may live,
Howe'er you proud town-sceptics view it,
We too must bend our knees to do it.

Confess this is not bookish lore;
'Tis feeling only, and no more.
Poets lack what you learning call,
And rustic poets, most of all.
Why from the plain truth should I shrink?
In woods men feel; in towns they think.
Yet, which is best? Thought, stumbling, plods
Past fallen temples, vanished gods,
Altars unincensed, fanes undecked,
Eternal systems flown or wrecked;
Through trackless centuries that grant

To the poor trudge refreshment scant,
Age after age, pants on to find
A melting mirage of the mind.
But feeling never wanders far,
Content to fare with things that are,
The same old track, the same loved face,
Familiar genius of the place;
From nature's simples to distil
Homely receipt for homely ill;
And finds, betwixt the sky and ground,
The sunshine of its daily round.
So swallows, though awhile they range
In quest of joy, in chase of change,
Once tenderer instincts flood their breast,
And twittering voices brim the nest,
Grown far too wise and well to roam,
Keep circling round the roof of home.

Now understand you, friend, why here
I linger passive all the year,
And let old thoughts and feelings gain
Their growth, like lichen, on my brain?—
Why the loud gusts of blame and praise,
That blow about your London ways,
To me are but as wind that shrills
About my orchard daffodils,
Only to make them shake their scent
Unto a wider continent!
But ere you go, if go you must,
Take this from me, at least, on trust.

In that fair tract 'twixt hill and main,
I sang of in my earliest strain,
Where fades not flower, nor falls the leaf,
And Godfrid brought Olympia grief,
Oft have I heard, as Spring comes round,
The snow-fed streams begin to sound;
Oft have I seen the almonds bloom
Round Dante's cradle, Petrarch's tomb;
Been there when banksia roses fall
In cataracts over Tuscan wall;
Oft watched Rome's dead Campagna break
To asphodels for April's sake;
Smelt the green myrtle browsed and left
By clambering goats in Ischian cleft;
Gathered the cistus-blooms that lay,
Like flecks of fresh unmelted spray,
Round Paleocastrizza's bay;
Drunk of the nectar wafted o'er
The wave from Zante's perfumed shore;
Plucked Delphi's flowering bays that twine
No garlands now for brows divine;
Stretched me on Acro-Corinth's brow,
Just when the year was young as now;
Have half-way up Hymettus heard
In Attic grove the Attic bird;
Sailed past the crimson Judas-trees
That flame o'er Stamboul's narrow seas,
And marked the cuckoo, from the shore,
Bid wintry Danube thaw once more.
But none of these, nor all, can match,

At least for him who loves to watch
The wild-flowers come, hear wild birds sing,
The rapture of an English Spring.
With us it loiters more than where
It comes, it goes, half unaware ;
Makes winter short, makes summer long,
In autumn half renews its song,
Nor even then doth hence depart,
But hybernates within my heart.

MY WINTER ROSE

I

Why did you come when the trees were bare?
Why did you come with the wintry air?
When the faint note dies in the robin's throat,
And the gables drip and the white flakes float?

II

What a strange, strange season to choose to come,
When the heavens are blind and the earth is dumb:
When nought is left living to dirge the dead,
And even the snowdrop keeps its bed!

III

Could you not come when woods are green?
Could you not come when lambs are seen?
When the primrose laughs from its childlike sleep,
And the violets hide and the bluebells peep?

IV

When the air as your breath is sweet, and skies
Have all but the soul of your limpid eyes,
And the year, growing confident day by day,
Weans lusty June from the breast of May?

V

Yet had you come then, the lark had lent
In vain his music, the thorn its scent,
In vain the woodbine budded, in vain
The rippling smile of the April rain.

VI

Your voice would have silenced merle and thrush,
And the rose outbloomed would have blushed to blush,
And Summer, seeing you, paused, and known
That the glow of your beauty outshone its own.

VII

So, timely you came, and well you chose,
You came when most needed, my winter rose.
From the snow I pluck you, and fondly press
Your leaves 'twixt the leaves of my leaflessness.

THREE SONNETS

WRITTEN IN MID-CHANNEL

I

Now upon English soil I soon shall stand,
Homeward from climes that fancy deems more fair;
And well I know that there will greet me there
No soft foam fawning upon smiling strand,
No scent of orange-groves, no zephyrs bland,
But Amazonian March, with breast half bare
And sleety arrows whistling through the air,
Will be my welcome from that burly land.
Yet he who boasts his birthplace yonder lies,
Owns in his heart a mood akin to scorn
For sensuous slopes that bask 'neath Southern skies,
Teeming with wine and prodigal of corn,
And, gazing through the mist with misty eyes,
Blesses the brave bleak land where he was born.

II

And wherefore feels he thus? Because its shore
Nor conqueror's foot nor despot's may defile,

But Freedom walks unarmed about the isle,
And Peace sits musing beside each man's door.
Beyond these straits, the wild-beast mob may roar,
Elsewhere the veering demagogue beguile:
We, hand in hand with the Past, look on and smile,
And tread the ways our fathers trod before.
What though some wretch, whose glory you may trace
Past lonely hearths and unrecorded graves,
Round his Sword-sceptre summoning swarms of slaves,
Menace *our* shores with conflict or disgrace,—
We laugh behind the bulwark of the waves,
And fling the foam defiant in his face.

III

And can it be,—when Heaven this deep moat made,
And filled it with the ungovernable seas,
Gave us the winds for rampart, waves for frise,
Behind which Freedom, elsewhere if betrayed,
Might shelter find, and flourish unafraid,—
That men who learned to lisp at English knees
Of English fame, to pamper womanish ease
And swell the surfeits of voracious trade
Shall the impregnable breakers undermine,
Take ocean in reverse, and, basely bold,
Burrow beneath the bastions of the brine?—
Nay, England, if the citadel be sold
For lucre thus, Tarpeia's doom be thine,
And perish smothered in a grave of gold!

March 1882.

LOVE'S BLINDNESS

Now do I know that Love is blind, for I
Can see no beauty on this beauteous earth,
No life, no light, no hopefulness, no mirth,
Pleasure nor purpose, when thou art not nigh.
Thy absence exiles sunshine from the sky,
Seres Spring's maturity, checks Summer's birth,
Leaves linnet's pipe as sad as plover's cry,
And makes me in abundance find but dearth.
But when thy feet flutter the dark, and thou
With orient eyes dawnest on my distress,
Suddenly sings a bird on every bough,
The heavens expand, the earth grows less and less,
The ground is buoyant as the ether now,
And all looks lovely in thy loveliness.

LOVE'S WISDOM

Now on the summit of Love's topmost peak
Kiss we and part; no farther can we go:
And better death than we from high to low
Should dwindle or decline from strong to weak.
We have found all, there is no more to seek;
All have we proved, no more is there to know;
And Time could only tutor us to eke
Out rapture's warmth with custom's afterglow.
We cannot keep at such a height as this;
And even straining souls like ours inhale
But once in life so rarefied a bliss.
What if we lingered till love's breath should fail!
Heaven of my Earth! one more celestial kiss,
Then down by separate pathways to the vale.

A FRAGMENT

I

SHOULD fickle hands in far-off days
No longer stroke thy hair,
And lips that once were proud to praise
Forget to call thee fair,
Sigh but my name, and though I be
Mute in the churchyard mould,
I will arise and come to thee,
And worship as of old.

II

And should I meet the wrinkled brow,
Or find the silver tress,
What were't to me, it would be thou,
I could not love thee less.
'Gainst love time wages bootless strife,
What now is would be then;
The cry that brought me back to life
Would make thee young again.

CONTENT

WRITTEN OFF ITHACA

I COULD not find the little maid Content,
So out I rushed, and sought her far and wide;
But not where Pleasure each new fancy tried,
Heading the maze of reeling merriment,
Nor where, with restless eyes and bow half bent,
Love in a brake of sweetbrier smiled and sighed,
Nor yet where Fame towered crowned and glorified,
Found I her face, nor wheresoe'er I went.
So homeward back I crawled like wounded bird,
When lo! Content sate spinning at my door:
And when I asked her where she was before—
"Here all the time," she said; "*I* never stirred;
Too eager in your search, you passed me o'er,
And, though I called, you neither saw nor heard."

GO AWAY, DEATH!

I

Go away, Death!
You have come too soon.
To sunshine and song I but just awaken,
And the dew on my heart is undried and unshaken;
Come back at noon.

II

Go away, Death!
What a short reprieve!
The mists of the morning have vanished, I roam
Through a world bright with wonder, and feel it my home;
Come back at eve.

III

Go away, Death !
See, it still is light.
Over earth broods a quiet more blissful than glee,
And the beauty of sadness lies low on the sea ;
Come back at night.

IV

Come to me, Death !
I no more would stay.
The night-owl hath silenced the linnet and lark,
And the wailing of wisdom sounds sad in the dark ;
Take me away.

LONGING

I

THE hill slopes down to the valley, the stream runs down to the sea,
And my heart, my heart, O far one! sets and strains towards thee.
But only the feet of the mountain are felt by the rim of the plain,
And the source and soul of the hurrying stream reach not the calling main.

II

The dawn is sick for the daylight, the morning yearns for the noon,
And the twilight sighs for the evening star and the rising of the moon.
But the dawn and the daylight never were seen in the self-same skies,
And the gloaming dies of its own desire when the moon and the stars arise.

III

The Springtime calls to the Summer, "Oh, mingle your
life with mine,"
And Summer to Autumn 'plaineth low, "Must the harvest
be only thine?"
But the daffodil dies when the swallow comes, ere the
leaf is the blossom fled;
And when Autumn sits on her golden sheaves, then the
reign of the rose is dead.

IV

And hunger and thirst, and wail and want, are lost in
the empty air,
And the heavenly spirit vainly pines for the touch of the
earthly fair.
And the hill slopes down to the valley, the stream runs
down to the sea,
And my heart, my heart, O far one! sets and strains
towards thee.

IMPROMPTU:

TO FRANCES GARNET WOLSELEY

Little maiden just beginning
To be comely, arch, and winning,
In whose form I catch the traces
Of your mother's gifts and graces,
And around whose head the glory
Of your father's growing story,
O'er whose cradle, fortune-guided,
Mars and Venus both presided,
May your fuller years inherit
Female charm and manly merit,
So that all may know who girt you
With vivacity and virtue,
Whence you had the luck to borrow
Pensive mien without its sorrow,
Dignity devoid of coldness,
Sprightliness without its boldness,

Raillery untipped by malice,
Playful wit and kindly sallies,
Eloquence averse from railing,
Each good point without its failing.
And when, little bud, you flower
Into maidenhood and power,
Fate no fainter heart allot you
Than the brave one that begot you,
So that you a race continue
Worthy of the blood within you,
Handing down the gifts you bring them,
With a better bard to sing them.

March 1877.

A NOVEMBER NOTE

I

Why, throstle, do you sing
In this November haze?
Singing for what? for whom?
Deem you that it is Spring,
Or that your lonely lays
Will stave off Winter's gloom?

II

Then did the bird reply:
"I sing because I know
That Spring will surely come:
That is the reason why,
Though menaced by the snow,
Even now I am not dumb.

III

"But few are they that hear,
And fewer still that feel,
The meaning of my song,
Until the note be clear,
Re-echoed be the peal,
Early, and late, and long.

IV

"But you have heard and owned
The sound of my refrain,
Yet tentative and low.
Thus, poet, be intoned
Your own foreshadowing strain,
Trusting that some will know:

V

"That some will know and say,
When greetings of the Spring
Wake Winter from its bed,
This is the self-same lay
We overheard him sing
When dead hearts deemed him dead."

UNSEASONABLE SNOWS

THE leaves have not yet gone; then why do ye come,
O white flakes falling from a dusky cloud?
But yesterday my garden-plot was proud
With uncut sheaves of ripe chrysanthemum.
Some trees the winds have stripped; but look on some,
'Neath double load of snow and foliage bowed,
Unnatural winter fashioning a shroud
For Autumn's burial ere its pulse be numb.
Yet Nature plays not an inhuman part:
In her, our own, vicissitudes we trace.
Do we not cling to our accustomed place,
Though journeying Death have beckoned us to start?
And faded smiles oft linger in the face,
While grief's first flakes fall silent on the heart!

A SPRING CAROL

I

BLITHE friend! blithe throstle! Is it thou,
Whom I at last again hear sing,
Perched on thy old accustomed bough,
Poet-prophet of the Spring?
Yes! Singing as thou oft hast sung,
I can see thee there among
The clustered branches of my leafless oak;
Where, thy plumage gray as it,
Thou mightst unsuspected sit,
Didst thou not thyself betray
With thy penetrating lay,
Swelling thy mottled breast at each triumphant stroke.
Wherefore warble half concealed,
When thy notes are shaft and shield,
And no hand that lives would slay
Singer of such a roundelay?
Telling of thy presence thus,
Be nor coy nor timorous!
Sing loud! Sing long!
And let thy song

Usurp the air 'twixt earth and sky:
Let it soar and sink and rally,
Ripple low along the valley,
Break against the fir-trees high,
Ofttimes pausing, never dying,
While we lean where fancy bids,
Listening, with half-closèd lids,
Unto the self-same chant, most sweet, most satisfying.

II

Where hast thou been all the dumb winter days,
When neither sunlight was nor smile of flowers,
Neither life, nor love, nor frolic,
Only expanse melancholic,
With never a note of thy exhilarating lays?
But, instead, the raven's croak,
Sluggish dawns and draggled hours,
Gusts morose and callous showers,
Underneath whose cutting stroke
Huddle the seasoned kine, and even the robin cowers.
Wast thou asleep in some snug hollow
Of my hybernating oak,
Through the dripping weeks that follow
One another slow, and soak
Summer's extinguished fire and autumn's drifting smoke?
Did its waking awake thee,
Or thou it with melody?
Or together did ye both
Start from winter's sleep and sloth,

And the self-same sap that woke
Bole and branch, and sets them budding,
Is thy throat with rapture flooding?
Or, avoiding icy yoke,
When golden leaves floated on silver meres,
And pensive Autumn, keeping back her tears,
Nursed waning Summer in her quiet lap,
Didst thou timely pinions flap,
Fleeing from a land of loss,
And, with happy mates, across
Ocean's restless ridges travel,
To that lemon-scented shore
Where, beneath a deep-domed sky,
Carven of lapis-lazuli,
Golden sunlight evermore
Glistens against golden gravel,
Nor ever a snowflake falls, nor rain-clouds wheel and ravel;
Clime where I wandered once among
Ruins old with feelings young,
Whither too I count to fly
When my songful seasons die,
And with the self-same spell which, first when mine,
Intensified my youth, to temper my decline.

III

Wherefore dost thou sing, and sing?
Is it for sheer joy of singing?
Is it to hasten lagging Spring,
Or greet the Lenten lilies through turf and tuft up-springing?

Dost thou sing to earth or sky?
Never comes but one reply:
Carol faint, carol high,
  Ringing, ringing, ringing!
Are those iterated trills
For the down-looking daffodils,
That have strained and split their sheath,
And are listening underneath?
Or but music's prompting note,
  Whereunto the lambs may skip?
Haply dost thou swell thy throat,
  Only to show thy craftsmanship?
Wouldst thou pipe if none should hearken?
If the sky should droop and darken,
  And, as came the hills more close,
Moody March to wooing Spring
  Sudden turned a mouth morose,—
Unheeded wouldst, unheeding, sing?
What is it rules thy singing season?
Instinct, that diviner reason,
To which the thirst to know seemeth a sort of treason?
      If it be,
      Enough for me,
  And any motive for thy music I
Will not ask thee to impart,
Letting my head play traitor to my heart,
  Too deeply questioning why.
Sing for nothing, if thou wilt,
  Or, if thou for aught must sing,

Sing unto thy anxious spouse,
Sitting somewhere 'mong the boughs,
In the nest that thou hast built,
Underneath her close-furled wing
Future carols fostering.
Sing, because it is thy bent;
Sing, to heighten thy content!
Sing, for secret none can guess;
Sing for very uselessness!
Sing for love of love and pleasure,
Unborn joy, unfound treasure,
Rapture no words can reach, yearning no thoughts can measure!

IV

Why dost thou ever cease to sing?
Singing is such sweet comfort, who,
If he could sing the whole year through,
Would barter it for anything?
Why do not thou and joy their reign assert
Over winter, death, and hurt?
If thou forcest them to flee,
They in turn will banish thee,
Making life betwixt ye thus
Mutably monotonous.
O, why dost thou not perch and pipe perpetually?
All the answer I do get,
Is louder, madder music yet;
Thus rebuking: Thou dost err!

I am no philosopher;
Only a poet, forced to sing,
  When the cold gusts gather and go,
When the earth stirs in its tomb,
And, asudden, witching Spring
  Into her bosom sucks the snow,
To give it back in thorn and cherry-bloom:
When along the hedgerows twinkle
Roguish eyes of periwinkle,
When with undulating glee
Yaffles scream from tree to tree,
And on every bank are seen
Primroses that long have been
Lying in wait with ambushed eyes
To break forth when Winter flies,
Joined by all things swift and sweet,
Following him with noiseless feet,
Pelting him with April showers,
  Chasing and chanting his defeat,
Till with undisputed flowers
  Thronged are all the lanes to greet
Dove-like inspiring Spring, many-voiced Paraclete.

V

Therefore, glad bird! warble, and shrill, and carol,
  Now that Earth whom winter stripped,
Putteth on her Spring apparel,
  Daintily woven, gaily tipped;
  Now that in the tussocked mead

Lambkins one another jostle,—
Carol, carol! jocund throstle!
Impregnating the air with thy melodious seed,
Which, albeit scattered late,
Now will quickly germinate,
Giving us who waited long
Vernal harvest of ripe song:
Which, I do perceive, was sent
Nowise to deepen argument,
Rather to teach me how, like thee,
To merge doubt in melody.
Sing, sing away,
All through the day,
Lengthening out the twilight gray,
And with thy trebles of delight
Invade the threshold of the night:
Until felicity, too high, too deep,
Saturated senses steep,
And all that lives and loves subside to songless sleep.

AT HIS GRAVE

I

Leave me a little while alone,
Here at his grave that still is strewn
    With crumbling flower and wreath;
The laughing rivulet leaps and falls,
The thrush exults, the cuckoo calls,
    And he lies hushed beneath.

II

With myrtle cross and crown of rose,
And every lowlier flower that blows,
    His new-made couch is dressed;
Primrose and cowslip, hyacinth wild,
Gathered by Monarch, peasant, child,
    A nation's grief attest.

III

I stood not with the mournful crowd
That hither came when round his shroud
    Pious farewells were said.

In the famed city that he saved,
By minaret crowned, by billow laved,
I heard that he was dead.

IV

Now o'er his tomb at last I bend,
No greeting get, no greeting tend,
Who never came before
Unto his presence, but I took,
From word or gesture, tone or look,
Some wisdom from his door.

V

And must I now unanswered wait,
And, though a suppliant at the gate,
No sound my ears rejoice?
Listen! Yes, even as I stand,
I feel the pressure of his hand,
The comfort of his voice.

VI

How poor were Fame, did grief confess
That death can make a great life less,
Or end the help it gave!
Our wreaths may fade, our flowers may wane,
But his well-ripened deeds remain,
Untouched, above his grave.

VII

Let this, too, soothe our widowed minds;
Silenced are the opprobrious winds
    Whene'er the sun goes down;
And free henceforth from noonday noise,
He at a tranquil height enjoys
    The starlight of renown.

VIII

Thus hence we something more may take
Than sterile grief, than formless ache,
    Or vainly-uttered vow;
Death hath bestowed what life withheld,
And he round whom detraction swelled,
    Hath peace with honour now.

IX

The open jeer, the covert taunt,
The falsehood coined in factious haunt,
    These loving gifts reprove.
They never were but thwarted sound
Of ebbing waves that bluster round
    A rock that will not move.

X

And now the idle roar rolls off;
Hushed is the gibe and shamed the scoff,
    Repressed the envious gird;

Since death, the looking-glass of life,
Cleared of the misty breath of strife,
Reflects his face unblurred.

XI

From callow youth to mellow age,
Men turn the leaf and scan the page,
And note, with smart of loss,
How wit to wisdom did mature,
How duty burned ambition pure,
And purged away the dross.

XII

Youth is self-love; our manhood lends
Its heart to pleasure, mistress, friends,
So that when age steals nigh,
How few find any worthier aim
Than to protract a flickering flame,
Whose oil hath long run dry!

XIII

But he, unwitting youth once flown,
With England's greatness linked his own,
And, steadfast to that part,
Held praise and blame but fitful sound,
And in the love of country found
Full solace for his heart.

XIV

Now in an English grave he lies:
With flowers that tell of English skies
And mind of English air,
A grateful Sovereign decks his bed,
And hither long with pilgrim tread
Will English feet repair.

XV

Yet not beside his grave alone
We seek the glance, the touch, the tone;
His home is nigh,—but there,
See from the hearth his figure fled,
The pen unraised, the page unread,
Untenanted the chair!

XVI

Vainly the beechen boughs have made
A fresh green canopy of shade,
Vainly the peacocks stray;
While Carlo, with despondent gait
Wonders how long affairs of State
Will keep his lord away.

XVII

Here most we miss the guide, the friend.
Back to the churchyard let me wend
And, by the posied mound,

Lingering where late stood worthier feet,
Wish that some voice, more strong, more sweet,
A loftier dirge would sound.

XVIII

At least I bring not tardy flowers.
Votive to him life's budding powers,
Such as they were, I gave—
He not rejecting: so I may
Perhaps these poor faint spices lay,
Unchidden, on his grave!

HUGHENDEN, *May* 1881.

A NIGHT IN JUNE

I

Lady! in this night of June
  Fair like thee and holy,
Art thou gazing at the moon
  That is rising slowly?
    I am gazing on her now:
    Something tells me, so art thou.

II

Night hath been when thou and I
  Side by side were sitting,
Watching o'er the moonlit sky
  Fleecy cloudlets flitting.
    Close our hands were linkèd then;
    When will they be linked again?

III

What to me the starlight still,
  Or the moonbeams' splendour,

If I do not feel the thrill
Of thy fingers slender?
Summer nights in vain are clear,
If thy footstep be not near.

IV

Roses slumbering in their sheaths
O'er my threshold clamber,
And the honeysuckle wreathes
Its translucent amber
Round the gables of my home:
How is it thou dost not come?

V

If thou camest, rose on rose
From its sleep would waken;
From each flower and leaf that blows
Spices would be shaken;
Floating down from star and tree,
Dreamy perfumes welcome thee.

VI

I would lead thee where the leaves
In the moon-rays glisten;
And, where shadows fall in sheaves,
We would lean and listen
For the song of that sweet bird
That in April nights is heard.

VII

And when weary lids would close,
And thy head was drooping,
Then, like dew that steeps the rose,
O'er thy languor stooping,
I would, till I woke a sigh,
Kiss thy sweet lips silently.

VIII

I would give thee all I own,
All thou hast would borrow;
I from thee would keep alone
Fear and doubt and sorrow.
All of tender that is mine,
Should most tenderly be thine.

IX

Moonlight! into other skies,
I beseech thee wander.
Cruel, thus to mock mine eyes,
Idle, thus to squander
Love's own light on this dark spot;—
For my lady cometh not!

THE REPLY OF Q. HORATIUS FLACCUS TO A ROMAN "ROUND-ROBIN"

Good friends, you urge my Odes grow trite,
  And that of worthless station,
Of fleeting youth and joy, I write
  With endless iteration.

But say, in mortals, base or great,
  Have you a change detected?
Are they, when victors, less elate,
  When vanquished, less dejected?

Do they no more in mundane mire
  For golden garbage scramble?
Or, but companioned with the lyre,
  Up twisting Anio ramble?

Hath fortune ceased to prove a jade?
  Hath favour waxed less fickle?
Hath shamed Bellona dropped her blade,
  Or Death put up his sickle?

Doth age no longer rime the hair?
  Finds Virtue always supper?
Or, when cit. rides a Knight, doth Care
  No more bestride the crupper?

Do not the rosy hours wax pale,
  New loves old loves disherit;
And sleight of golden showers prevail
  'Gainst Danae's brazen turret?

Sooth, *verbum sap.* But then, Jove knows!
  Men arè not wise, but foolish,
Whether they scan Soracte's snows,
  Or those near Ballachulish.

Still, still they hug the bestial sty,
  And have not changed one wee bit;
Unpleasing truth, which "*Repeti-*
  Ta decies (*non*) *placebit.*"

Ask such to share my Sabine meal!
  To twine the parsley classic!
For such to break the Manlian seal,
  And liberate my Massic!

A pretty tale! Why, ken you not,
  Good friends, as lately showed I,
In verse already you've forgot,—
  Profanum vulgus odi?

Fair maid or Minister I dine,
   Toast Rome or *Alma Venus*:
When Lydia will not kiss my wine,
   Why, then, I ask Mæcenas.

For such and self the chords I strike
   Of wisdom, love, and scorning;
And if the world my themes dislike,
   Well,—gentlemen, Good morning!

THE GOLDEN YEAR!

I

When piped the love-warm throstle shrill,
  And all the air was laden
With scent of dew and daffodil,
  I saw a youth and maiden,
Whose colour, Spring-like, came and fled,
  'Mong purple copses straying,
While birchen tassels overhead
  Like marriage-bells kept swaying;
Filled with that joy that lingers still,
  Which Eve brought out of Aiden,—
With scent of dew and daffodil
  When all the air was laden.

II

When primrose banks turn pale and fade,
  And meads wax deep and golden,
And in lush dale and laughing glade
  Summer's gay Court is holden,

Them, nestling close, again I saw,
  Affianced girl and lover,
She looking up with eyes of awe
  To burning gaze above her;
Playing anew the part oft played,
  Sung by the poets olden,—
When primrose banks turn pale and fade,
  And meads wax deep and golden.

III

When autumn woods began to glow,
  And autumn sprays to shiver,
Once more I saw them walking slow,
  By sedgy-rustling river.
The season's flush was on her cheek,
  The season's sadness o'er him:
He stroked her hand, and bade her speak
  Of all the love she bore him.
That only made her tears to flow,
  And chill his heart to quiver,—
While autumn woods began to glow,
  And autumn sprays to shiver.

IV

When winter fields stretched stiff and stark,
  And wintry winds shrilled eerie,
I saw him creep, alone, at dark,
  Into the churchyard dreary.

He laid him down against the stone,
'Neath which she aye lay sleeping,
Kissed its cold face with many a moan,
Then loudly fell a-weeping:
"Oh! let me in from lonely cark,
Or come thou back, my dearie!"—
But the wintry fields stretched stiff and stark,
And the wintry winds shrilled eerie!

SONG

I

Go talk to her, sweet flower,
  To whom I fain would talk
Tell her I hour by hour
  Pine on my own poor stalk.

II

Tell her that I should live
  Not quite so sore distressed,
If she to you would give
  A throne upon her breast.

III

Tell her that should she hie
  To my parched plot to see
If I be dead, that I
  No more should withered be.

IV

If I were dead, her feet
  My spirit would revive,
As may her bosom sweet
  Keep you, sweet flower, alive.

FELIX OPPORTUNITATE MORTIS

Exile or Cæsar? Death hath solved thy doubt,
And made thee certain of thy changeless fate;
And thou no more hast wearily to wait,
Straining to catch the people's tarrying shout
That from unrestful rest would drag thee out,
And push thee to those pinnacles of State
Round which throng courtly loves, uncourted hate,
Servility's applause, and envy's flout.
Twice happy boy! though cut off in thy flower,
The timeliest doom of all thy race is thine:
Saved from the sad alternative, to pine
For heights unreached, or icily to tower,
Like Alpine crests that only specious shine,
And glitter on the lonely peak of Power.

June 1879.

ALL HAIL TO THE CZAR!

I

All hail to the Czar! By the fringe of the foam
That thunders, untamed, around Albion's shore,
See multitudes throng, dense as sea-birds whose home
Is betwixt the deaf rocks and the ocean's mad roar;
And across the ridged waters stand straining their eyes
For a glimpse of the Eagle that comes from afar:
Lo! it swoops towards the beach, and they greet it with
cries
That silence the billows—"All hail to the Czar!"

II

All hail to the Czar! England's noblest and best,
Her oldest, her newest, her proudest are there,
And they vie in obeisance before the great guest,
For the prize of his nod, for the alms of his stare.

To the seat of their Empire they draw him along,
Where the Palace flies open to welcome his car,
And Prince, Press, and People, with leader and song,
Ring the change on the pæan—" All hail to the Czar!"

III

All hail to the Czar! the bold Monarch who shook
From the heart of the Lion its insolent lust,
That once from the strongest no outrage would brook,
Till it crouched at his feet, till it crawled in the dust!
Who the laurels bequeathed to us tore from our brow,
Who extinguished our fame that once shone like a star,
Made our rulers to tremble, our heralds to bow,
And our bosoms to mock us—" All hail to the Czar!"

IV

All hail to the Czar! O yes! show him your ships,
Had your courage not failed, he had seen before now,
As they dally at anchor, the gag on their lips,
And the peace-loving holiday trim on their prow!
Yes! show him your army, that mighty array
He so rashly defied when he ventured to mar
The last work of its hands, and remind it to say,
But with bayonets inverted—" All hail to the Czar!"

V

All hail to the Czar! As ye revel and feast,
I marvel the ghosts of the bootlessly slain
Do not come from their cold lonely graves in the East,
From the hillside that looks o'er the desolate main,
Which they perished to save, ye surrender, to live,
To the man ye now slaver, all base as ye are!
Do not stalk through the banquet-hall, pallid, and give
The gay toast ere ye drink it—"All hail to the Czar!"

VI

All hail to the Czar! For his daughter he gave,
Like Atrides of old, without shrinking or qualm,
Though not that the white ships might move o'er the wave,
But that ours still might ride in immovable calm!
What Religion could once, now can Statecraft persuade;
And if ye would devote to the furies of war
Half as freely your sons as he gave up his maid,
Without shame might ye shout then—"All hail to the Czar!"

VII

All hail to the Czar! Are ye then sunk so low,
O ye sons of the once fearless masters of earth!

That ye pour out the wine for an insolent foe,
That in depths of dishonour ye simulate mirth?
That, like unto mongrel hounds beaten and cowed,
Ye, crouched, lick alternately smiter and scar?—
Oh, rather my country lay deaf in its shroud,
Than had lived to hear silent—"All hail to the Czar!"

May 1874.

TO ENGLAND

MEN deemed thee fallen, did they? fallen like Rome,
Coiled into self to foil a Vandal throng:
Not wholly shorn of strength, but vainly strong;
Weaned from thy fame by a too happy home,
Scanning the ridges of thy teeming loam,
Counting thy flocks, humming thy harvest song,
Callous, because thyself secure, 'gainst wrong,
Behind the impassable fences of the foam!
The dupes! Thou dost but stand erect, and lo!
The nations cluster round; and while the horde
Of wolfish backs slouch homeward to their snow,
Thou, 'mid thy sheaves in peaceful seasons stored,
Towerest supreme, victor without a blow,
Smilingly leaning on thy undrawn sword!

April 1878.

A COUNTRY NOSEGAY

I

Where have you been through the long sweet hours
  That follow the fragrant feet of June?
By the dells and the dingles gathering flowers,
  Ere the dew of the dawn be sipped by noon.

II

And sooth each wilding that buds and blows
  You seem to have found and clustered here,
Round the rustic sprays of the child-like rose
  That smiles in one's face till it stirs a tear.

III

The clambering vetch, and the meadow-sweet tall,
  That nodded good-day as you sauntered past,
And the poppy flaunting atop of the wall,
  Which, proud as glory, will fade as fast.

IV

The campion bladders the children burst,
The bramble that clutches and won't take nay,
And the pensive delicate foxgloves nursed
In woods that curtain from glare of day.

V

The prosperous elder that always smells
Of homely joys and the cares that bless,
And the woodbine's waxen and honeyed cells,
A hive of the sweetest idleness.

VI

And this wayside nosegay is all for me,
For me, the poet—the word sounds strong ;—
Well, for him at least, whatever he be,
Who has loitered his morning away in song.

VII

And though sweetest poems that ever were writ,
With the posy that up to my gaze you lift,
Seem void of music and poor of wit,
Yet I guess your meaning, and take your gift.

VIII

For 'tis true among fields and woods I sing,
Aloof from cities, and my poor strains
Were born, like the simple flowers you bring,
In English meadows and English lanes.

IX

If e'er in my verse lurks tender thought,
 'Tis borrowed from cushat or blackbird's throat;
If sweetness any, 'tis culled or caught
 From boughs that blossom and clouds that float.

X

No rare exotics nor forced are these;
 They budded in darkness and throve in storm;
They drank their colour from rain and breeze,
 And from sun and season they took their form.

XI

They peeped through the drift of the winter snows;
 They waxed and waned with the waning moon;
Their music they stole from the deep-hushed rose,
 And all the year round to them is June.

XII

So let us exchange, nor ask who gains,
 What each has saved from the morning hours:
Take, such as they are, my wilding strains,
 And I will accept your wilding flowers.

THE SPRING-TIME, O THE SPRING-TIME!

I

THE Spring-time, O the Spring-time!
  Who does not know it well?
When the little birds begin to build,
  And the buds begin to swell.
When the sun with the clouds plays hide-and-seek,
  And the lambs are bucking and bleating,
And the colour mounts to the maiden's cheek,
  And the cuckoo scatters greeting;
      In the Spring-time, joyous Spring-time!

II

The Summer, O the Summer!
  Who does not know it well?
When the ringdoves coo the long day through,
  And the bee refills his cell.
When the swish of the mower is heard at morn,
  And we all in the woods go roaming,
And waiting is over, and love is born,
  And shy lips meet in the gloaming;
      In the Summer, ripening Summer!

III

The Autumn, O the Autumn!
Who does not know it well?
When the leaf turns brown, and the mast drops down,
And the chestnut splits its shell.
When we muse o'er the days that have gone before,
And the days that will follow after,
When the grain lies deep on the winnowing-floor,
And the plump gourd hangs from the rafter;
In the Autumn, thoughtful Autumn!

IV

The Winter, O the Winter!
Who does not know it well?
When, day after day, the fields stretch gray,
And the peewit wails on the fell.
When we close up the crannies and shut out the cold,
And the wind sounds hoarse and hollow,
And our dead loves sleep in the churchyard mould,
And we feel that we soon shall follow;
In the Winter, mournful Winter!

A QUESTION

Love, wilt thou love me still when wintry streak
Steals on the tresses of autumnal brow;
When the pale rose hath perished in my cheek,
And those are wrinkles that are dimples now?
Wilt thou, when this fond arm that here I twine
Round thy dear neck to help thee in thy need,
Droops faint and feeble, and hath need of thine,
Be then my prop, and not a broken reed?
When thou canst only glean along the Past,
And garner in thy heart what Time doth leave,
O, wilt thou then to me, love, cling as fast
As nest of April to December eave;
And, while my beauty dwindles and decays,
Still warm thee by the embers of my gaze?

AN ANSWER

Come, let us go into the lane, love mine,
And mark and gather what the Autumn grows:
The creamy elder mellowed into wine,
The russet hip that was the pink-white rose;
The amber woodbine into rubies turned,
The blackberry that was the bramble born;
Nor let the seeded clematis be spurned,
Nor pearls, that now are corals, of the thorn.
Look! what a lovely posy we have made
From the wild garden of the waning year.
So when, dear love, your summer is decayed,
Beauty more touching than is clustered here
Will linger in your life, and I shall cling
Closely as now, nor ask if it be Spring.

TO BEATRICE STUART-WORTLEY

ÆTAT 2

I

PATTER, patter, little feet,
Making music quaint and sweet,
Up the passage, down the stair;
Patter, patter everywhere.

II

Ripple, ripple, little voice;
When I hear you, I rejoice.
When you cease to crow and coo,
Then my heart grows silent too.

III

Frolic, frolic, little form,
While the day is young and warm.
When the shadows shun the west,
Climb up to my knee, and rest.

IV

Slumber, slumber, little head,
Gambols o'er and night-prayers said.
I will give you in your cot
Kisses that awake you not.

V

Open, open, little lids!
Lambs are frisking in the meads;
Blackcaps flit from stem to stem;
Come and chirp along with them.

VI

Change not, change not, little fay;
Still be as you are to-day.
What a loss is growth of sense,
With decrease of innocence!

VII

Something in your little ways
Wins me more than love or praise.
You have gone, and I feel still
Void I somehow cannot fill.

VIII

Yes, you leave, when you depart,
Empty cradle in my heart,
Where I sit and rock my pain,
Singing lullaby in vain.

IX

Come back, come back, little feet!
Bring again the music sweet
To the garden, to the stair;
Patter, chatter everywhere.

HENRY BARTLE EDWARD FRERE

BORN A.D. 1815. DIED A.D. 1884

I

BEND down and read—the birth, the death, the name.
Born in the year that Waterloo was won,
And died in this, whose days are not yet run,
But which, because a year conceived in shame,
No noble need will christen or will claim.
And yet this dead man, England, was Thy son,
And at his grave we ask what had he done,
Bred to be famous, to be foiled of Fame.
Be the reply his epitaph : That he,
In years as youth, the unyielding spirit bore
He got from Thee, but Thou hast got no more ;
And that it is a bane and bar to be
A child of Thine, now the adventurous sea
All vainly beckons to a shrinking shore.

II

Therefore, great soul, within your marble bed
Sleep sound, nor hear the useless tears we weep.

Why should you wake, when England is asleep,
Or care to live, since England now is dead?
Forbidden are the steeps where Glory led;
No more from furrowed danger of the deep
We harvest greatness; to our hearths we creep,
Count and recount our coin, and nurse our dread.
The sophist's craft hath grown a prosperous trade,
And womanish Tribunes hush the manly drum:
The very fear of Empire strikes us numb,
Fumbling with pens, who brandished once the blade.
Therefore, great soul, sleep sound where you are laid,
Blest in being deaf when Honour now is dumb.

A CAPTIVE THROSTLE

Poor little mite with mottled breast,
Half-fledged, and fallen from the nest,
For whom this world hath just begun,
Who want to fly, yet scarce can run;
Why open wide your yellow beak?
Is it for hunger, or to speak—
To tell me that you fain would be
Loosed from my hand to liberty?

Well, you yourself decide your fate,
But be not too precipitate.
Which will you have? If you agree
To quit the lanes, and lodge with me,
I promise you a bed more soft,
Even than that where you aloft
First opened wondering eyes, and found
A world of green leaves all around.
When you awake, you straight shall see
A fresh turf, green and velvety,
Well of clear water, sifted seed,
All things, in short, that bird can need;

And gentle beings, far more fair
Than build on bough, or skim through air,
When all without is wet and bleak,
Laying against your cage their cheek,
To make you pipe shall coax and coo,
And bud their pretty lips at you.
And when the clammy winter rain
Drips from the roof and clouds the pane,
When windows creak and chimneys roar,
And beggars wail outside the door,
And stretch out fingers lank and thin,
You shall be safely housed within,
And through the wood-fire's flickering glow
Watch drifting leaves or driving snow,
Till Marian pulls the shutters up,
And you go sleep, and I go sup.

But now suppose I let you go,
To rains that beat, to winds that blow,
To heedless chance and prowling foe?
Mayhap this very day, alas!
You will be drowned in tangled grass:
Or, that escaped, some slinking stoat
May seize and suck your speckled throat;
Or hawk slow wheeling in the sky
Your fluttering feeble wings descry,
And, straightway downward flashing thence,
Relish and rend your innocence.
Should you survive, and glad and strong
Make autumn spring-like with your song,

You will be lured, the very first,
Where netted berries bulge and burst,
And, by their guardian caught alive,
You may, before I can arrive
To bid him not be so unsparing,
Have paid the forfeit of your daring.
Time too will come, there will not be
Berry on bush, or pod on tree,
Stripped be the hawthorn, bare the holly,
And all the boughs drip melancholy;
And you will have to scrape for food
Amid a frosty solitude.

Which shall it be? Now quick decide!
Safety confined, or peril wide?

Then did the little bird reply:
"'Tis true, as yet I scarce can fly;
But oh! it is such joy to try!
Just as you came, I was beginning
To win my wings, exult in winning;
To feel the promptings of the pinion,
The dawn of a divine dominion
Over the empty air, and over
Fields of young wheat and breadths of clover:
Pledge of a power to scale, some day,
My native elm-tree's topmost spray,
And mid the leaves and branches warm
Sing far beyond the reach of harm.

And shall I barter gift like this
For doled-out joy and measured bliss?
For a trim couch and dainty fare
Forfeit the freedom of the air?
Shall I exchange for punctual food
April's sweet loves and summer's brood;
The dewy nest 'neath twinkling stars
For crushing roof and cramping bars?
No! Come what chance or foe that may,
Menace of death this very day,
The weasel's clutch, the falcon's swoop—
What if these kill? they do not coop.
Autumn's worst ambush, winter's rage,
Are sweeter than the safest cage."

Off, little mite! I let you fly,
And do as I would be done by.

Nature within your heart hath sown
A wisdom wiser than my own,
And from your choice I learn to prize
The birth-right of unbounded skies,
Delightful danger of being free,
Sweet sense of insecurity;
The privilege to risk one's all
On being nor captive, caged, nor thrall,
The wish to range, the wing to soar
Past space behind, through space before,
The ecstasy of unknown flight,
The doubt, the danger, the delight,

To range and roam, unchained, unvext,
Nor know what worlds will open next;
And, since Death waits both caged and free
To die, at least, of liberty.

AT VAUCLUSE

I

By Avignon's dismantled walls,
Where cloudless mid-March sunshine falls,
  Rhone, through broad belts of green,
Flecked with the light of almond groves,
Upon itself reverting, roves
  Reluctant from the scene.

II

Yet from stern moat and storied tower,
From sprouting vine, from spreading flower,
  My footsteps cannot choose
But turn aside, as though some friend
Were waiting for my voice, and wend
  Unto thy vale, Vaucluse!

III

For here, by Sorgue's sequestered stream,
Did Petrarch fly from fame, and dream
Life's noonday light away;
Here build himself a studious home,
And, careless of the crowns of Rome,
To Laura lend his lay:

IV

Teaching vain tongues that would reward
With noisy praise the shrinking bard,
Reminding thus the proud,
Love's sympathy, to him that sings,
Is more than smiles of courts and kings,
Or plaudits of the crowd.

V

For poor though love that doth not rouse
To deeds of glory dreaming brows,
What but a bitter sweet
Is loftiest fame, unless it lay
The soldier's sword, the poet's bay,
Low at some loved one's feet?

VI

Where are his books? His garden, where?
I mount from flowery stair to stair,
While fancy fondly feigns
Here rose his learned lintel, here
He pondered, till the text grew clear,
Of long-forgotten strains.

VII

On trackless slopes and brambled mounds
The laurel still so thick abounds,
That Nature's self, one deems,
Regretful of his vanished halls,
Still plants the tree whose name recalls
The lady of his dreams.

VIII

Aught more than this I cannot trace.
There is no footstep, form, nor face
To vivify the scene;
Save where, but culled to fling away,
Posies of withering wildflowers say,
"Here children's feet have been."

IX

Yet there's strange softness in the skies:
The violet opens limpid eyes,
  The woodbine tendrils start;
Like childhood, winning without guile,
The primrose wears a constant smile,
  And captive takes the heart.

X

All things remind of him, of her.
Stripped are the slopes of beech and fir,
  Bare rise the crags above;
But hillside, valley, stream, and plain,
The freshness of his muse retain,
  The fragrance of his love.

XI

Why did he hither turn? Why choose
Thy solitary gorge, Vaucluse?
  Thy Fountain makes reply,
That, like the muse, its waters well
From source none ne'er can sound, and swell
  From springs that run not dry.

XII

Or was it he might drink the air
That Laura breathed in surging prayer
  Or duty's stifled sigh;
Feel on his cheek the self-same gale,
And listen to the same sweet wail
  When summer nights are nigh?

XIII

May-be. Of Fame he deeply quaffed:
But thirsting for the sweeter draught
  Of Love, alas for him!
Though draining glory to the dregs,
He was like one that vainly begs,
  And scarcely sips the brim.

XIV

Is it then so, that glory ne'er
Its throne with happiness will share,
  But, baffling half our aim,
Grief is the forfeit greatness pays,
Lone places grow the greenest bays,
  And anguish suckles fame?

XV

Let this to lowlier bards atone,
Whose unknown Laura is their own,
  Possessing and possest;
Of whom if sooth they do not sing,
'Tis that near her they fold their wing,
  To drop within her nest.

XVI

Adieu, Vaucluse! Swift Sorgue, farewell!
Thy winding waters seem to swell
  Louder as I depart;
But evermore, where'er I go,
Thy stream will down my memory flow
  And murmur through my heart.

FAREWELL TO SPRING

I

I SAW this morning, with a sudden smart,
Spring preparing to depart.
I know her well and so I told her all my heart.

II

"Why did you, Spring, your coming so delay,
If, now here, you cannot stay?
You win my love and then unloving pass away.

III

"We waited, waited, O so long, so long,
Just to hear the ousel's song.
To-morrow 'twill be hushed, to-day that is so strong.

IV

"Day after day, and dawn again on dawn,
Winter's shroud was on the lawn,
So still, so smooth, we thought 'twould never be withdrawn.

V

'Now that at last your welcome mimic snow
Doth upon the hawthorn blow,
It bides not on the bough, but melts before we know.

VI

"Scarce hath the primrose o'er the sordid mould
Lavished treasure, than behold!
Our wealth of simple joy is robbed of all its gold.

VII

"When to the woods we hie with feet of mirth,
Now the hyacinths have birth,
Swiftly the blue of Heaven fades from the face of earth.

VIII

"You with dry gusts and unrelenting wrack
Kept the liquid cuckoo back.
Now, even ere he goes, he turneth hoarse, alack!

IX

"When, in the long warm nights of June,
Nightingales have got their tune,
Their sweet woe dies, and we are beggared of the boon.

X

"First drops the bloom, then darkens the green leaf;
Everything in life is brief,
Save autumn's deepening gloom and winter's changeless grief."

XI

Then with a smile thus answered me the Spring:
"To my voice and flight you cling,
For I, before I perch, again am on the wing.

XII

"With you were I the whole year round to stay,
'Twould be you that went away,
Your love made fickle by monotony of May.

XIII

"Love cannot live save upon love beyond.
Leaving you, I keep you fond,
Not letting you despair, but making you despond.

XIV

'Farewell, and love me still, my lover dear,
Love me till another year,
And you, if you be true, again will find me here."

XV

Then darker, deeper, waxed the woods; the ground
Flowerless turned and then embrowned;
And less was of sweet scent, and less was of sweet sound.

XVI

Mute was the mavis, moulted was the thorn,
Meads were cut, and lambs were shorn,
And I by Spring was left forsaken and forlorn.

XVII

Forlorn, forsaken, shall I be until
Primrose peep and throstle shrill,
And in the orchard gleam the outriding daffodil.

XVIII

Then shall I know that Spring among the trees
Hiding is, and that the breeze
Anew will fling abroad odours and melodies.

THE POET AND THE MUSE

(*The Poet speaks*)

I

WHITHER, and whence, and why hast fled?
Thou art dumb, my muse; thou art dumb, thou art dead,
As a waterless stream, as a leafless tree.
What have I done to banish thee?

II

But a moon ago, the whole day long
My ears were full of the sound of song;
And still through my darkly silent dreams
Plashed the fitful music of far-off streams.

III

When the night turned pale and the stars grew dim,
The morning chanted a dewy hymn.
The fragrant languor of cradled noon
Was lulled by the hum of a self-sung tune.

IV

Joy came on the wings of a jocund lay,
And sorrow in harmony passed away;
And the sunny hours of tideless time
Were buoyed on the surges of rolling rhyme.

V

The moon went up in a cloudless sky,
Silently but melodiously;
And the glitter of stars and the patter of rain
Were notes and chords of an endless strain.

VI

And vision, and feeling, and sound, and scent,
Were the strings of a sensitive instrument,
That silently, patiently, watched and waited,
And unto my soul reverberated.

VII

In the orchard reddens the rounded fruit
'Mid the yellowing leaves, but my voice is mute.
The thinned copse sighs like a heart forsaken,
But not one chord of my soul is shaken.

VIII

Through the gloaming broadens the harvest moon;
The fagged hind whistles his homeward tune;
The last load creaks up the hamlet hill;
'Tis only my voice, my voice that is still.

(*The Muse answers*)

I

Poet, look in your poet's heart.
It will tell you what keepeth us twain apart.
I have not left you ; I still am near.
But a music not mine enchants your ear.

II

Another hath entered and nestles deep
In the lap of your love, like a babe asleep.
You watch her breathing from morn till night ;
She is all your hearing and all your sight.

III

Yet fear not, poet, to do me wrong.
She is sweeter far than the sweetest song.
One looks and listens the way she went,
As towards lark that is lost in the firmament.

IV

So gladly to her I you resign,
Her caress is tenderer much than mine ;
I hover round you, and hear her kiss
With wonder at its melodiousness.

V

When you gaze on the moon, you see but her.
You hear her feet when the branches stir;
And sunrise and sunset and starlight only
Make their beauty, without her, feel more lonely.

VI

So how should you, poet, hope to sing?
The lute of Love hath a single string.
Its note is sweet as the coo of the dove;
But 'tis only one note, and the note is Love.

VII

But when once you have paired and built your nest,
And can brood therein with a settled breast,
You will sing once more, and your voice will stir
All hearts with the sweetness gained from her.

POETS' CORNER

I

I STAND within the Abbey walls,
Where soft the slanting sunlight falls
In gleams of mellow grace:
The organ swells, the anthem soars,
And waves of prayerful music pours
Throughout the solemn space.

II

Slowly the chanted yearning dies:
Then spoken supplications rise,
Upfloating to the sky;
The organ peals anew, again
Is silent, and there linger then
Only my soul and I.

III

But what are these mute busts that gaze
On me from out the vanished days,
        And bid me pause and scan
Tablet, inscription, title, date,
All that records the vain estate
        Of transitory man?

IV

Read I aright? And can it be,
Old Abbey, that dead bards in thee
        A resting-place have found?
Is not this consecrated air?
This is the house, the home, of prayer,
        This, this is sacred ground.

V

And who were they? Their fretful life
With heavenly precept was at strife;
        No pious peace they knew:
Like thunderstorms, against the wind
They pressed, and from their lurid mind
        Alarming lightnings flew.

VI

Creeds were to them but chains to break;
No formulas their thirst could slake,
No faith their hunger feed;
Their prayers were breathed to unscaled crags,
They worshipped where the eagle flags,
And the snow-streams flash and speed.

VII

Their temple was the earth, the air,
The stars that in night's silence share;
Unto the plunging brine
Listening, they heard a sacred hymn,
And deep within the woodlands dim
Found transept, aisle, and shrine.

VIII

All shapes of sensuous beauty stole
A pathway to the poet's soul;
An unresisting slave
To smiles that win, to tears that melt,
Whatever hearts can feel, he felt,
Whatever ask for, gave.

IX

His heart to love as quick he lent,
As flower to wandering wind its scent,
    Or lark to sun its song ;
He spent himself in gusts of joy,
Chased the fair phantoms that decoy
    And youth's brief reign prolong.

X

Yet it was wise as well as just
Not upon his rebellious dust
    The Abbey gates to close,
But bid him hither wend, and find,
What life refused his eager mind,
    Glory and yet repose.

XI

For should there come that threatened day,
When creeds shall fade, when faith decay,
    And worship shall have ceased,
Then, when all formal guides shall fail,
Mankind will in the Poet hail
    A prophet and a priest.

XII

He will instruct us still to strain
Towards something to redress our pain,
To elevate our joy;
Something responding to that sense
Of restlessness that calls us hence,
And makes existence cloy.

XIII

What though commandment, dogma, rite,
One after one, shall perish quite,
The Poet still will keep
The Sanctuary's lamp alight,
And, in the body's deepest night,
Forbid the soul to sleep.

XIV

Then, apprehended right, his lays
Shall seem a hymn of prayer and praise
To purify from stain;
Shall bridge with love the severed years,
Instil the sacredness of tears,
The piety of pain.

XV

Devotion at his touch shall wake,
The fountains of emotion quake
With tenderness divine;
His melody our cravings lift
Upward, and have the saving gift
Of sacramental wine.

XVI

Let him then rest where now he lies,
So that if narrower ritual dies,
Devout feet still may come,
Confessing, what his strains impart,
The deep religion of the heart,
That never will be dumb.

A WINTRY PICTURE

Now where the bare sky spans the landscape bare,
Up long brown fallows creeps the slow brown team,
Scattering the seed-corn that must sleep and dream,
Till by Spring's carillon awakened there.
Ruffling the tangles of his thicket hair,
The stripling yokel steadies now the beam,
Now strides erect with cheeks that glow and gleam,
And whistles shrewdly to the spacious air.
Lured onward to the distance dim and blear,
The road crawls weary of the travelled miles:
The kine stand cowering in unmoving files;
The shrewmouse rustles through the bracken sere;
And, in the sculptured woodland's leafless aisles,
The robin chants the vespers of the year.

I CHIDE NOT AT THE SEASONS

I CHIDE not at the seasons, for if Spring
With backward look refuses to be fair,
My Love still more than April makes me sing,
And shows May blossom in the bleak March air.
Should Summer fail its tryst, or June delay
To wreathe my porch with roses red and pale,
Her breath is sweeter than the new-mown hay,
Her touch more clinging than the woodbine's trail.
Let Autumn like a spendthrift waste the year,
And reap no harvest save the fallen leaves,
My Love still ripeneth, though she grows not sere,
And smiles enthroned upon our piled-up sheaves.
And last, when miser Winter docks the days,
She warms my hearth and keeps my hopes ablaze.

AN APRIL LOVE

NAY, be not June, nor yet December, dear,
But April always, as I find thee now:
A constant freshness unto me be thou,
And not the ripeness that must soon be sere.
Why should I be Time's dupe, and wish more near
The sobering harvest of thy vernal vow?
I am content, so still across thy brow
Returning smile chase transitory tear.
Then scatter thy April heart in sunny showers;
I crave nor Summer drouth nor Winter sleet:
As Spring be fickle, so thou be as sweet;
With half-kept promise tantalise the hours;
And let Love's frolic hands and woodland feet
Fill high the lap of Life with wilding flowers.

GEORGE ELIOT

DEAD! Is she dead?
And all that light extinguished!
Mend your words,
Those gropings of the blind along plain paths
Where all the Heavens are shining! Know you not,
Though the Eternal Luminary dips
Below our cramped horizon, leaving here
Only a train of glory, he but goes
To dawn on other and neglected worlds,
Benighted of his presence! So with her,
Whose round imagination, like the sun,
Drew the sad mists of the low-lying earth
Up to her own great altitude, and there
Made them in smiling tears evaporate.
Announce the sun's self dead, and o'er him roll
An epitaph of darkness;—then aver
She too has set for ever.
Think it thus,
If for sweet comfort's sake. What we call death
Is but another sentinel despatched

To relieve life, weary of being on guard,
Whose active service is not ended here,
But after intermission is renewed
In other fields of duty. This to her
Was an uncertain promise, since it seems,
Unto the eye of seriousness, unreal,
That, like a child, death should but play with life,
Blowing it out, to blow it in again.
This contradiction over, now she stands
Certain of all uncertainty, and dwells
Where death the sophist puzzles life no more,
But with disdainful silence or clear proof
Confuted is for ever.
Yet our loss
By others' gain is mended not, and we
Sit in the darkness that her light hath left.
Comfort our grief with symbols as we will,
Her empty throne stares stony in our face,
And with a dumb relentlessness proclaims
That she has gone for ever, for ever gone,
Returning not. . . . How plain I see her now,
The twilight tresses, deepening into night,
The brow a benediction, and the eyes
Seat where compassion never set, and like
That firm, fixed star, which altereth not its place
While all the planets round it sink and swim,
Shone with a steady guidance. O, and a voice
Matched with whose modulations softest notes
Of dulcimer by daintiest fingers stroked,
Or zephyrs wafted over summer seas,

On summer shores subsiding, sounded harsh.
Listening whereto, steeled obduracy felt
The need to kneel, necessity to weep,
And craving to be comforted; a shrine
Of music and of incense and of flowers,
Where hearts, at length self-challenged, were content
Still to be sad and sinful, so they might
Feel that exonerating pity steal
In subtle absolution on their guilt.
Dead? Never dead!
That this, man's insignificant domain,
Which is not boundary of space, should be
The boundary of life, revolts the mind,
Even when bounded. Into soaring space
Soar, spacious spirit! unembarrassed now
By earthly boundaries, and circle up
Into the Heaven of Heavens, and take thy place
Where the Eternal Morning broadens out
To recognise thy coming. Realm on Realm
Of changeless revolution round thee roll,
Thou moving with them, and among the stars
Shine thou a star long looked for; or, unbuoyed,
Beyond the constellations of our ken,
Traverse the infinite azure with thy heart,
And with love's light elucidate the Spheres;
While we, below, this meek libation pour,
Mingled of honey and hyssop, on thy grave!

December 29, 1880.

NIGHTINGALE AND CUCKOO

Yes, nightingale and cuckoo! it was meet
That you should come together; for ye twain
Are emblems of the rapture and the pain
That in the April of our life compete,
Until we know not which is the more sweet,
Nor yet have learned that both of them are vain!
Yet wherefore, nightingale! break off thy strain,
While yet the cuckoo doth his call repeat?
Not so with me. To sweet woe did I cling
Long after echoing happiness was dead,
And so found solace. Now, alas! the sting!
Cuckoo and nightingale alike have fled;
Neither for joy nor sorrow do I sing,
And autumn silence gathers in their stead.

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT

WITHIN the hollow silence of the night
I lay awake and listened. I could hear
Planet with punctual planet chiming clear,
And unto star star cadencing aright.
Nor these alone: cloistered from deafening sight,
All things that are, made music to my ear:
Hushed woods, dumb caves, and many a soundless mere,
With Arctic mains in rigid sleep locked tight.
But ever with this chant from shore and sea,
From singing constellation, humming thought,
And life through time's stops blowing variously,
A melancholy undertone was wrought;
And from its boundless prison-house I caught
The awful wail of lone Eternity.

THE ACQUITTAL OF PHRYNE

When Athens challenged Phryne to confess
Eleusis' self sufficed not to appal
Her impious tread, and, throned within their Hall,
The awful judges frowned on her distress,
Slowly her lovely limbs she did undress,
Swathe upon swathe, fold after fold, let fall,
Until she stood, absolved, before them all,
Clad in her clear convincing nakedness.
So when the slaves of custom would control
Your range of feeling and your realm of thought,
And close you half the world who claim the whole,
Show them your inmost self, keep back not aught,
By your mind's beauty be their bias bought,
And sway by bare simplicity of soul.

TO ELLEN TERRY

(After seeing her act Lady Macbeth)

Bring forth men-children only.—Macbeth Act I, Scene 7.

Nay, bring forth none but daughters: daughters young,
The doubles of yourself; with face as fair,
Bearing as candid, gait as debonair,
And voice as deeply, musically strung:
That the less fortunate age, from this age sprung,
In those transmitted gleams of what you were,
May hear your laughter, gaze on your despair,
And all but know the witchery of your tongue.
Thus shall the unsteadfast dagger of Macbeth
Be nerved by his male spouse; thus Shylock's knife,
Glittering to smite, be dulled by Portia's breath;
Thus saucy Bėatrice be won for life,
Juliet in loving warble out her life,
And true Ophelia madden unto death.

June 29, 1889.

WHY ENGLAND IS CONSERVATIVE

I

Because of our dear Mother, the fair Past,
On whom twin Hope and Memory safely lean,
And from whose fostering wisdom none shall wean
Their love and faith, while love and faith shall last:
Mother of happy homes and Empire vast,
Of hamlets meek, and many a proud demesne,
Blue spires of cottage smoke 'mong woodlands green,
And comely altars where no stone is cast.
And shall we barter these for gaping Throne,
Dismantled towers, mean plots without a tree,
A herd of hinds too equal to be free,
Greedy of other's, jealous of their own,
And, where sweet Order now breathes cadenced tone,
Envy, and hate, and all uncharity?

II

Banish the fear! 'Twere infamy to yield
To folly what to force had been denied,
Or in the Senate quail before the tide
We should have stemmed and routed in the field.

What though no more we brandish sword and shield,
Reason's keen blade is ready at our side,
And manly brains, in wisdom panoplied,
Can foil the shafts that treacherous sophists wield.
The spirit of our fathers is not quelled.
With weapons valid even as those they bore,
Domain, Throne, Altar, still may be upheld,
So we disdain, as they disdained of yore,
The foreign froth that foams against our shore,
Only by its white cliffs to be repelled!

III

Therefore, chime sweet and safely, village bells,
And, rustic chancels, woo to reverent prayer,
And, wise and simple, to the porch repair
Round which Death, slumbering, dreamlike heaves and swells.
Let hound and horn in wintry woods and dells
Make jocund music though the boughs be bare,
And whistling yokel guide his gleaming share
Hard by the homes where gentle lordship dwells.
Therefore sit high enthroned on every hill,
Authority! and loved in every vale;
Nor, old Tradition, falter in the tale
Of lowly valour led by lofty will:
And, though the throats of envy rage and rail,
Be fair proud England proud fair England still!

THE OWL AND THE LARK

I

A GRIZZLED owl at midnight moped
  Where thick the ivy glistened;
So I, who long have vainly groped
  For wisdom, leaned and listened.

II

Its perch was firm, its aspect staid,
  Its big eyes gleamed and brightened;
Now, now at last, will doubt be laid,
  Now yearning be enlightened.

III

"Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!" the bird discoursed,
  "Tu-whoo! Tu-whit!" repeated:
Showing how matter was, when forced
  Through space, condensed and heated;

IV

How rent, but spinning still, 'twas sphered
In star, and orb, and planet,
Where, as it cooled, live germs appeared
In lias, sand, and granite:

V

And, last, since nothing 'neath the sun
Avoids material tether,
How life must end, when once begun,
In scale, and hoof, and feather.

VI

Then, flapping from the ivy-tod,
It slouched around the gable,
And, perching there, discussed if God
Be God, or but a fable.

VII

In pompous scales Free Will and Fate
Were placed, and poised, and dangled,
And riddles small from riddles great
Expertly disentangled.

VIII

It drew betwixt "Tu-whit," "Tu-whoo,"
Distinctions nice and nicer:
The bird was very wise, I knew,
But I grew no whit wiser.

IX

Then, letting metaphysics slip,
It mumbled moral thunder;
Showing how Virtue's self will trip
If Reason chance to blunder.

X

Its pleated wings adown its breast
Were like a surplice folded;
And, if the truth must be confessed,
It threatened me and scolded.

XI

I thought the lecture somewhat long,
Impatient for its ending;
When, sudden, came a burst of song!
It was the lark ascending.

XII

Dew gleamed in many a jewelled cup,
The air was bright and gracious;
And away the wings and the song went up,
Up through the ether spacious.

XIII

They bubbled, rippled, up the dome,
In sprays of silvery trilling;
Like endless fountain's lyric foam,
Still falling, still refilling.

XIV

And when I could no more descry
The bird, I still could hear it;
For sight, but not for soul, too high,
Unseen but certain Spirit.

XV

All that the perched owl's puckered brow
Had vainly bid me ponder,
The lark's light wings were solving now
In the roofless dome up yonder.

XVI

Then brief as lightning-flash,—no more,—
I passed beyond the Finite;
And, borne past Heaven's wide-open door,
Saw everything within it.

XVII

Slow showering down from cloudless sphere,
The wanderer Elysian
Dropped nearer, clearer, to the ear,
Then back into the vision.

XVIII

On his own song he seemed to swim;
Diving through song, descended:
Since I had been to Heaven with him,
Earth now was apprehended.

XIX

O souls perplexed by hood and cowl,
Fain would you find a teacher,
Consult the lark and not the owl,
The poet, not the preacher.

XX

While brains mechanic vainly weave
The web and woof of thinking,
Go, mount up with the lark, and leave
The bird of wisdom blinking.

OFF MESOLONGI

I

THE lights of Mesolongi gleam
  Before me, now the day is gone;
And vague as leaf on drifting stream,
  My keel glides on.

II

No mellow moon, no stars arise;
  In other lands they shine and roam:
All I discern are darkening skies
  And whitening foam.

III

So on those lights I gaze that seem
  Ghosts of the beacons of my youth,
Ere, rescued from their treacherous gleam,
  I steered towards truth.

IV

And you, too, Byron, did awake,
    And ransomed from the cheating breath
Of living adulation, stake
    Greatness on death !

V

Alas ! the choice was made too late.
    You treated Fame as one that begs,
And, having drained the joys that sate,
    Offered the dregs.

VI

The lees of life you scornful brought,
    Scornful she poured upon the ground :
The honoured doom in shame you sought,
    You never found.

VII

" The Spartan borne upon his shield "
    Is not the meed of jaded lust ;
And, ere your feet could reach the field,
    Death claimed your dust.

VIII

Upon the pillow, not the rock,
    Like meaner things you ebbed away,
Yearning in vain for instant shock
    Of mortal fray.

IX

The futile prayer, the feeble tear,
All that deforms the face of death,
You had to bear, whilst in your ear
Hummed battle's breath.

X

You begged the vulture, not the worm,
Might feed upon your empty corse.
In vain! Just Nemesis was firm
'Gainst late remorse.

XI

Too much you asked, too little gave,
The crown without the cross of strife.
What is it earns a soldier's grave?
A soldier's life.

XII

Think not I come to taunt the dead.
My earliest master still is dear;
And what few tears I have to shed,
Are gathering here.

XIII

Behind me lies Ulysses' isle,
The wanderer wise who pined for home.
But Byron! Neither tear nor smile
Forbade you roam.

XIV

Yours was that bitterest mortal fate,
No choice save thirst or swinish trough:
Love's self but offered sensuous bait,
Or virtuous scoff.

XV

Yet was it well to wince, and cry
For anguish, and at wrong to gird?
Best,—like your gladiator, die
Without a word!

XVI

There be, who in that fault rejoice,
Since sobs survive as sweetest lays,
And yours remains the strongest voice
Of later days.

XVII

For me, I think of you as One
Who vaguely pined for worthier lot
Than to be blinked at like the sun,
But found it not.

XVIII

Who blindly fought his way from birth,
Nor learned, till 'twas too late to heed,
Not all the noblest songs are worth
One noble deed:

XIX

Who, with the doom of glory cursed,
   Still played the athlete's hollow part,
And 'neath his bay-green temples nursed
   A withered heart.

XX

On, silent keel, through silent sea.
   I will not land where He, alas!
Just missed Fame's crown. Enough for me
   To gaze, and pass.

April 1881.

AN AUTUMN PICTURE

Now round red roofs stand russet stacks arow :
Homeward from gleaning in the stubbly wheat,
High overhead the harsh rook saileth slow,
And cupless acorns crackle 'neath your feet.
No breeze, no breath, veereth the oasthouse hoods,
Whence the faint smoke floats fragrantly away ;
And, in the distance, the half-hazy woods
Glow with the barren glory of decay.
Vainly the bramble strives to drape the hedge,
Whose leafless gaps show many an empty nest :
The chill pool stagnates round the seeded sedge ;
And, as the sunset saddens in the west,
Funereal mist comes creeping down the dale,
And widowed Autumn weeps behind her veil.

A MARCH MINSTREL

I

Hail ! once again, that sweet strong note !
  Loud on my loftiest larch,
Thou quaverest with thy mottled throat,
  Brave minstrel of bleak March !

II

Hearing thee flute, who pines or grieves
  For vernal smiles and showers ?
Thy voice is greener than the leaves,
  And fresher than the flowers.

III

Scorning to wait for tuneful May
  When every throat can sing,
Thou floutest Winter with thy lay,
  And art thyself the Spring.

IV

While daffodils, half mournful still,
Muffle their golden bells,
Thy silvery peal o'er landscape chill
Surges, and sinks, and swells.

V

Across the unsheltered pasture floats
The young lamb's shivering bleat:
There is no trembling in thy notes,
For all the snow and sleet.

VI

Let the bullace bide till frosts have ceased,
The blackthorn loiter long;
Undaunted by the blustering east,
Thou burgeonest into song.

VII

Yet who can wonder thou dost dare
Confront what others flee?
Thy carol cuts the keen March air
Keener than it cuts Thee.

VIII

The selfish cuckoo tarrieth till
April repays his boast.
Thou, thou art lavish of thy trill,
Now when we need it most.

IX

The nightingale, while birds are coy,
Delays to chant its grief.
Brave throstle! thou dost pipe for joy
With never a bough in leaf.

X

Even fond turtle-doves forbear
To coo till woods are warm:
Thou hast the heart to love and pair
Ere the cherry blossoms swarm.

XI

The skylark, fluttering to be heard
In realms beyond his birth,
Soars vainly heavenward. Thou, wise bird!
Art satisfied with earth.

XII

Thy home is not upon the ground,
Thy hope not in the sky:
Near to thy nest thy notes resound,
Neither too low nor high.

XIII

Blow what wind will, thou dost rejoice
To carol, and build, and woo.
Throstle! to me impart thy voice;
Impart thy wisdom too.

TO ALFRED TENNYSON

Poet! in other lands, when Spring no more
Gleams o'er the grass, nor in the thicket-side
Plays at being lost and laughs to be descried,
And blooms lie wilted on the orchard floor,
Then the sweet birds that from Ægean shore
Across Ausonian breakers thither hied,
Own April's music in their breast hath died,
And croft and copse resound not as before.
But, in this privileged Isle, this brave, this blest,
This deathless England, it seems always Spring.
Though graver wax the days, Song takes not wing.
In Autumn boughs it builds another nest:
Even from the snow we lift our hearts and sing,
And still your voice is heard above the rest.

A WILD ROSE

I

THE first wild rose in wayside hedge,
This year I wandering see,
I plück, and send it as a pledge,
My own Wild Rose, to Thee.

II

For when my gaze first met thy gaze,
We were knee-deep in June:
The nights were only dreamier days,
And all the hours in tune.

III

I found thee, like the eglantine,
Sweet, simple, and apart;
And, from that hour, thy smile hath been
The flower that scents my heart.

IV

And, ever since, when tendrils grace
  Young copse or weathered bole
With rosebuds, straight I see thy face,
  And gaze into thy soul.

V

A natural bud of love Thou art,
  Where, gazing down, I view,
Deep hidden in thy fragrant heart,
  A drop of heavenly dew.

VI

Go, wild rose, to my Wild Rose dear;
  Bid her come swift and soon.
O would that She were always here!
  It then were always June.

LOOK SEAWARD, SENTINEL!

I

Look seaward, Sentinel, and tell the land
What you behold.

Sentinel

I see the deep-ploughed furrows of the main
  Bristling with harvest; funnel, and keel, and shroud,
  Heaving and hurrying hither through gale and cloud,
Winged by their burdens; argosies of grain,
Flocks of strange breed and herds of southern strain,
  Fantastic stuffs and fruits of tropic bloom,
Antarctic fleece and equatorial spice,
Cargoes of cotton, and flax, and silk, and rice,
  Food for the hearth and staples for the loom:
Huge vats of sugar, casks of wine and oil,
  Summoned from every sea to one sole shore
  By Empire's sceptre; the converging store
Of Trade's pacific universal spoil.
And heaving and hurrying hitherward to bring
  Tribute from every zone, they lift their voices,
  And, as a strong man revels and rejoices,
They loudly and lustily chant, and this the song they sing.

Chorus of Home-coming Ships

From the uttermost bound
  Of the wind and the foam,
From creek and from sound,
  We are hastening home.
We are laden with treasure
  From ransacked seas,
To charm your leisure,
  To grace your ease.
We have trodden the billows,
  And tracked the ford,
To soften your pillows,
  To heap your board.
The hills have been shattered,
The forests scattered,
Our white sails tattered,
  To swell your hoard.
Is it blossom, or fruit, or
  Seed, you crave?
The land is your suitor,
  The sea your slave.
We have raced with the swallows,
  And threaded the floes
Where the walrus wallows
  Mid melting snows;
Sought regions torrid,
  And realms of sleet,
To gem your forehead,
  To swathe your feet.

And behold, now we tender,
With pennons unfurled,
For your comfort and splendour,
The wealth of the world.

II

Look landward, Sentinel, and tell the sea
What you behold.

SENTINEL

I see a land of liberty and peace,
Ancient in glory and strength, but young in mien,
Like immemorial forest Spring makes green,
And whose boughs broaden as the years increase:
Where ruminating hide and grazing fleece
Dapple lush meadows diapered with flowers,
Lambs bleat, birds carol, rosy children roam,
The glad hind whistles as he wendeth home,
And red roofs nestle under gray church-towers:
Whose sons have in their fearless eyes the light
Of centuries of fame and battles won
And Empire ranging roundward with the sun;
Whose fair frank daughters gleam upon the sight
Fresh as the dawn and florid as the Spring;
And, as from lowly porch and lordly dwelling
They sally forth and meet, with voices swelling
Harmoniously they chant, and this the song they sing.

Chorus of Islanders

Blest be the cliffs and the crags that girdle
Our island home,
And blest, thrice blest, the tempests that scourge and curdle
The sea into foam.
For the nations over the wave eat, sleep, and labour,
In doubt and dread;
The spear is the child at their threshold, the naked sabre
The bride by their bed.
But we behind bulwarks of brine and rampart of breakers,
Year after year,
Drop the seed in the drill and the furrow, and harvest our acres,
And feel no fear.
While they wattle their flocks, and remember the past, and shudder,
And finger the sword,
Our lambs go safe to the ewes, our calves to the udder,
Our fruits to the board.
Welcome the sleet that blinds and the blasts that buffet,
And welcome the roar
Of the storms that swoop on the sea and rend and rough it
Around our shore.
For in safety the yearling fattens, the heifer browses,
The herds increase;
In safety we fondle our babes, in safety our spouses,
In safety, freedom, and peace.

III

Look again seaward, but beyond the sea,
And say what you behold.

SENTINEL

I see weeping and wailing, and the bridegroom ruthlessly torn
From the clinging arms of the bride, and I see and I hear
Clanking of steel and clarions clamouring clear,
And suckling mothers, wedded but forlorn,
Cradling their babes amid the half-cut corn;
Whose fathers, as the homely days grew ripe
When fruits are plucked and mellow harvest stored,
Felt the soft curving sickle from their gripe
Timelessly wrenched, and in its place a sword.
And I see the nations, like to restless waves,
Surging against each other, withal afraid
To close and clash, lest blade prove strong as blade,
And even the victor win but worthless graves.
And wearying of the days and nights that bring
Nor respite nor reward, they moan and murmur
Under their breath, until with accents firmer
They sadly and surlily chant, and this the song they sing.

CHORUS OF ARMED NATIONS

How long shall we, we only, bear the burden
And sweat beneath the strain

Of iron Peace, while others gain the guerdon,
And prosper on our pain?
Lo! in their fancied fortress girt with waters
That neither fall nor fail,
They hear of rapine and they read of slaughters,
As of some touching tale.
No more they care to subjugate the billow,
Or dominate the blast;
Supine they lie on the luxurious pillow
Of their resplendent Past.
Lulled into arrogant languor by the glories
Of their adventurous sires,
They tell each other old heroic stories
By comfortable fires.
Why should they pile up wealth who do not labour?
Why, sowing not, should reap?
Let us steal out, and with unslumbering sabre
Assassinate their sleep.

IV

Look again landward, Sentinel, and say
What there you now behold.

SENTINEL

I see the sports deserted on the green,
And song and revel hushed within the hall;
And I hear strong voices to strong voices call
To muster round the shore in martial sheen.

And north of Trent and south of Thames are seen
  Furnace and forge and factory vomiting fire,
While swarthy faces, labouring through the night,
On giant anvils giant hammers smite,
  From molten metal moulding hoop and tire.
In port and arsenal rhythmic thunders ring,
  And through their gateways laden tumbrils rattle;
  And England's sinewy striplings, trim for battle,
In unison cheer and chant, and this the song they sing.

Chorus of Islanders

Sweet are the ways of peace, and sweet
    The gales that fan the foam
That sports with silvery-twinkling feet
    Around our island home.
But should the winds of battle shrill,
    And the billows crisp their mane,
Down to the shore, from vale, from hill,
    From hamlet, town, and plain!
The ocean our forefathers trod
    In many a forest keel,
Shall feel our feet once more, but shod
    With ligaments of steel.
Ours is the Sea, to rule, to keep,
    Our realm, and if ye would
Challenge dominion of the deep,
    Then make that challenge good.
But ware ye lest your vauntings proud
    Be coffined in the surge,

Our breakers be for you a shroud,
        Our battle-song your dirge.
Peaceful within our peaceful home
        We ply the loom and share,
Peaceful above the peaceful foam
        Our pennons float and fare;
Bearing, for other peaceful lands,
        Through sunshine, storm, and snow,
The harvest of industrious hands
        Peacefully to and fro.
But, so ye will it, then our sails
        The blasts of war shall swell,
And hold and hulk, now choked with bales,
        Be crammed with shot and shell.
The waves impregnably shall bear
        Our bulwarks on their breast,
And eyes of steel unsleeping glare
        Across each billowy crest;
Along the trenches of the deep
        Unflinching faces shine,
And Briton's stalwart sailors keep
        The bastions of the brine.
Ocean itself, from strand to strand,
        Our citadel shall be,
And, though the world together band,
Not all the legions of the land
Shall ever wrest from England's hand
        The Sceptre of the Sea.

THE LOVER'S SONG

I

WHEN Winter hoar no longer holds
  The young year in his gripe,
And bleating voices fill the folds,
  And blackbirds pair and pipe;
Then coax the maiden where the sap
  Awakes the woodlands drear,
And pour sweet wildflowers in her lap,
  And sweet words in her ear.
For Springtime is the season, sure,
  Since Love's game first was played,
When tender thoughts begin to lure
  The heart of April maid,
                Of maid,
      The heart of April maid.

II

When June is wreathed with wilding rose,
  And all the buds are blown,
And O, 'tis joy to dream and doze
  In meadows newly mown;

Then take her where the graylings leap,
And where the dabchick dives,
Or where the bees in clover reap
The harvest for their hives.
For Summer is the season when,
If you but know the way,
A maid that's kissed will kiss again,
Then pelt you with the hay,
The hay,
Then pelt you with the hay.

III

When sickles ply among the wheat,
Then trundle home the sheaves,
And there's a rustling of the feet
Through early-fallen leaves;
Entice her where the orchard glows
With apples plump and tart,
And tell her plain the thing she knows,
And ask her for her heart.
For Autumn is the season, boy,
To gather what we sow:
If you be bold, she won't be coy,
Nor ever say you no,
Say no,
Nor ever say you no.

IV

When woodmen clear the coppice lands,
And arch the hornbeam drive,

And stamp their feet, and chafe their hands,
  To keep their blood alive;
Then lead her where, when vows are heard,
  The church-bells peal and swing,
And, as the parson speaks the word,
  Then on her clap the ring.
For Winter is a cheerless time
  To live and lie alone;
But what to him is snow or rime,
  Who calls his love his own,
                    His own,
        Who calls his love his own?

ON RETURNING TO ENGLAND

There! once again I stand on home,
Though round me still there swirls the foam,
Leaping athwart the vessel's track
To bid a wanderer welcome back,
And though as yet through softening haze
White cliffs but vaguely greet my gaze.
For, England! yours the waves, the spray,
And, be one's foothold what it may,
Wherever billow wafts or wends,
Your soil is trodden, your shore extends.
How stern! how sweet! Though fresh from lands
Where soft seas heave on slumbering strands,
And zephyrs moistened by the south
Seem kisses from an infant's mouth,
My northern blood exults to face
The rapture of this rough embrace,
Glowing in every vein to feel
The cordial caress of steel
From spear-blue air and sword-blue sea,
The armour of your liberty.

Braced by the manly air, I reach
My soul out to the approaching beach,
And own, the instant I arrive,
The dignity of being alive!

And now with forward-faring feet
Eager I leap to land, and greet
The hearty grasp, the honest gaze,
The voice that means the thing it says,
The gait of men by birthright free,
Unceremonial courtesy.
None frown, none cringe, but, fearless-eyed,
Are kindly all; since, side by side,
Authority and Freedom reign
In twin equality, and drain
Their sanction from the self-same breast,
And Law is wise Will manifest.
Yes, this is England, frank and fair:
I tread its turf, I breathe its air,
And catch from every stalwart lung
The music of my mother tongue.

And who are these that cluster round
With hastening feet and silvery sound,
And eyes as liquid as the dawn,
When laughs the dew on Kentish lawn?
These England's daughters, frank yet arch,
Supple as April, strong as March:
Like pink-white windflowers in the grove,
That came while east and west wind strove

For mastery, and Spring seemed late,
Hardy alike and delicate.
How well their faces fit the scene,
The copses gray, the hedgerows green,
The white-veiled blackthorn, gorse afire,
The cottage yew, the village spire;
The pastures flecked with frisking lambs
Around their gravely grazing dams;
The children loitering home from school,
Their hands and pinafores all full
Of cuckoo-pint and bluebell spike,
Gathered in dingle, dell, and dyke;
The comely homes one just can see
Through flowering belts of bush and tree,
That all combine, all, all conspire,
To more than satisfy desire,
To make one love this lovely earth,
And bless Heaven for one's British birth.

Bewitching climes! where late I sought
In change of scene a change of thought,
Refreshment from familiar ground,
And, what I sought for, more than found,
Where old enchantment haunteth still
Ligurian coast and Tuscan hill,
Climes I have ventured oft and long
To celebrate in faltering song,
Where fearless almond, faery larch,
Smiling, disarm the frown of March,

Snow hath no terrors, frost no sting,
And playful Winter mimics Spring,
Deem me not thankless nor deny
Fresh welcome from your shore and sky,
Repose from thought so oft implored,
And ne'er refused, if, now restored
By you to health, by you to home,
Glad I return, late glad to roam.
For dear to me though wayside shrine
By silent gorge or murmuring brine;
Dear though the barefoot peasant folk
Who lop the vine and steer the yoke
Of soft-eyed, sleek-skinned, creamy beeves,
Up narrow ways to broad slant eaves;
The stony mule-tracks twisting slow
Up slopes where cherry-blossoms blow
'Mid olive gray and ilex brown,
On to some sun-bronzed mountain town;
The hush and cool of marble domes,
Where, wed to reverie, one roams
Through transept, chancel, cloister, cell,
Where still with far-off faces dwell
Sages and saints devoutly limned
By hands long dust and eyes long dimmed;
Dear though all these, and ne'er forgot,
No southern shore, no sunniest spot,
Not Roccabruna's hamlet crest,
Not Eza's brow, not Taggia's breast,
Not Bellosguardo's sunset hour,
Not Dante's seat nor Giotto's Tower,

Nor even Spiaggiascura's foam,
Moisten and melt my heart like home.
For here the cuckoo seems more glad,
The nightingale more sweetly sad,
Primroses more akin in gaze
To childlike wonder, childlike ways;
And all things that one sees and hears,
Since rooted in the bygone years,
And blending with their warm caress
A touch of homely tenderness,
Bid the quick instinct in one's blood
Pay tribute unto motherhood.
How should strange lands, it boots not where,
Divorce one from one's native air,
Or in a loyal breast dethrone
Unreasoning reverence for one's own?
Yet love and reason surely blend
To stir this passion and commend?
And who will blame if, though one seeks
In gentler tides and sterner peaks
Contrast to northern hill and main,
I cherish still and hold apart
The fondest feeling in my heart
For where, beneath one's parent sky,
Our dear ones live, our dead ones lie!

And you, dear friend, who linger still
Beside the iris-crested rill
That silvers through your olives gray
From convent-capped Fiesole,

Think not that I forget, forswear,
The scenes we lately vowed so fair.
To these your wandering footsteps bring
The freshness of an English Spring;
And even Florence sunnier glows,
When Phyllis prattles and Ivor crows.
And though among them still you stray,
Sweet-lengthening-out a Tuscan May,
You too will here return before
Our Northern roses blow once more,
To prove to all of kindred birth,
For winsome grace and sterling worth,
Nothing can match, where'er we roam,
An English wife in English home.

THE PASSING OF THE PRIMROSES

I

Primroses, why do you pass away?

Primroses

Nay, rather, why should we longer stay?
We are not needed, now stooping showers
Have sandalled the feet of May with flowers.

II

Surely, surely, 'tis time to go,
Now that the splendid bluebells blow,
Scattering a bridal peal, to hail
June blushing under her hawthorn veil.

III

We abode with you all the long winter through:
You may not have seen us, but we saw you,
Chafing your hands in the beaded haze,
And shivering home to your Yuletide blaze.

IV

Why should we linger, when all things pass?
We have buried old Winter beneath the grass,
Seen the first larch break, heard the first lamb bleat,
Watched the first foal stoop to its mother's teat:

V

The crocus prick with its spears aglow
'Gainst the rallying flakes of the routed snow,
The isle-keeping titmouse wed and hatch,
And the swallow come home to its native thatch:

VI

Fresh emeralds jewel the bare-brown mould,
And the blond sallow tassel herself with gold,
The hive of the broom brim with honeyed dew,
And Springtime swarm in the gorse anew.

VII

When breastplated March his trumpets blew,
We laughed in his face, till he laughed too;
Then, drying our lids when the sleet was done,
Smiled back to the smile of the April sun.

VIII

We were first to hear, in the hazel moat,
The nut-brown bird with the poet's note,
That sings, "Love is neither false nor fleet,"
Makes passion tender, and sorrow sweet.

IX

We were stretched on the grass when the cuckoo's voice
Bade the old grow young, and the young rejoice;
The half-fledged singer who flouts and rails,
So forces the note when his first note fails:

X

Who scorns, understanding but in part,
The sweet solicitudes of the heart,
But might learn, from the all-year-cooing dove,
That joy hath a briefer life than love.

XI

We would rather go ere the sweet Spring dies.
We have seen the violet droop its eyes,
The sorrel grow green where the celandine shone,
And the windflower fade ere you knew 'twas gone.

XII

The campion comes to take our place,
And you will not miss us in brake or chase,
Now the fragile frond of the fern uncurls,
And the hawthorns necklace themselves with pearls.

XIII

When June's love crimsons the cheek of the rose,
And the meadow-swathes sweep in rhythmic rows,
And foxgloves gleam in the darkest glen,
You will not recall nor regret us then.

XIV

Leave us our heavenly lot, to cheer
Your lives in the midnight of the year;
And 'tis meet that our light should be withdrawn,
Being stars of winter, with summer's dawn.

XV

For we do not sink into death's dank cave;
The earth is our cradle, and not our grave:
The tides and the stars sway it low and high,
And the sycamore bees hum lullaby.

XVI

But when winds roam lonely and dun clouds drift,
Let Winter, the white-haired nurse, but lift
The snowy coverlet softly, then
We will open our eyelids, and smile again.

XVII

How oft have you longed that your little ones would
Outgrow not the charm of babyhood,
Keep the soft round arms and the warm moist kiss,
And the magic of April sinlessness!

XVIII

Then chide us not, now we look good-bye:
We are the children for whom you sigh.
We slip 'neath the sod before summer's prime,
And so keep young to the end of time.

SINCE WE MUST DIE

I

THOUGH we must die, I would not die
  When fields are brown and bleak,
When wild-geese stream across the sky,
  And the cart-lodge timbers creak.
For it would be so lone and drear
  To sleep beneath the snow,
When children carol Christmas cheer,
  And Christmas rafters glow.

II

Nor would I die, though we must die,
  When yeanlings blindly bleat,
When the cuckoo laughs, and lovers sigh,
  And O, to live is sweet!
When cowslips come again, and Spring
  Is winsome with their breath,
And Life's in love with everything—
  With everything but Death.

III

Let me not die, though we must die,
  When bowls are brimmed with cream,
When milch-cows in the meadows lie,
  Or wade amid the stream;
When dewy-dimpled roses smile
  To see the face of June,
And lad and lass meet at the stile,
  Or roam beneath the moon.

IV

Since we must die, then let me die
  When flows the harvest ale,
When the reaper lays the sickle by,
  And taketh down the flail;
When all we prized, and all we planned,
  Is ripe and stored at last,
And Autumn looks across the land,
  And ponders on the past:
                Then let me die.

IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

I

Is life worth living? Yes, so long
As Spring revives the year,
And hails us with the cuckoo's song,
To show that she is here;
So long as May of April takes,
In smiles and tears, farewell,
And windflowers dapple all the brakes,
And primroses the dell;
While children in the woodlands yet
Adorn their little laps
With ladysmock and violet,
And daisy-chain their caps;
While over orchard daffodils
Cloud-shadows float and fleet,
And ousel pipes and laverock trills,
And young lambs buck and bleat;
So long as that which bursts the bud
And swells and tunes the rill,
Makes springtime in the maiden's blood,
Life is worth living still.

II

Life not worth living! Come with me,
Now that, through vanishing veil,
Shimmers the dew on lawn and lea,
And milk foams in the pail;
Now that June's sweltering sunlight bathes
With sweat the striplings lithe,
As fall the long straight scented swathes
Over the crescent scythe;
Now that the throstle never stops
His self-sufficing strain,
And woodbine-trails festoon the copse,
And eglantine the lane;
Now rustic labour seems as sweet
As leisure, and blithe herds
Wend homeward with unweary feet,
Carolling like the birds;
Now all, except the lover's vow,
And nightingale, is still;
Here, in the twilight hour, allow,
Life is worth living still.

III

When Summer, lingering half-forlorn,
On Autumn loves to lean,
And fields of slowly yellowing corn
Are girt by woods still green;
When hazel-nuts wax brown and plump,
And apples rosy-red,

And the owlet hoots from hollow stump,
And the dormouse makes its bed;
When crammed are all the granary floors,
And the Hunter's moon is bright,
And life again is sweet indoors,
And logs again alight;
Aye, even when the houseless wind
Waileth through cleft and chink,
And in the twilight maids grow kind,
And jugs are filled and clink;
When children clasp their hands and pray
"Be done Thy heavenly will!"
Who doth not lift his voice, and say,
"Life is worth living still"?

IV

Is life worth living? Yes, so long
As there is wrong to right,
Wail of the weak against the strong,
Or tyranny to fight;
Long as there lingers gloom to chase,
Or streaming tear to dry,
One kindred woe, one sorrowing face
That smiles as we draw nigh;
Long as at tale of anguish swells
The heart, and lids grow wet,
And at the sound of Christmas bells
We pardon and forget;
So long as Faith with Freedom reigns,
And loyal Hope survives,

And gracious Charity remains
To leaven lowly lives;
While there is one untrodden tract
For Intellect or Will,
And men are free to think and act
Life is worth living still.

V

Not care to live while English homes
Nestle in English trees,
And England's Trident-Sceptre roams
Her territorial seas!
Not live while English songs are sung
Wherever blows the wind,
And England's laws and England's tongue
Enfranchise half mankind!
So long as in Pacific main,
Or on Atlantic strand,
Our kin transmit the parent strain,
And love the Mother-Land;
So long as in this ocean Realm,
Victoria and her Line
Retain the heritage of the helm,
By loyalty divine;
So long as flashes English steel,
And English trumpets shrill,
He is dead already who doth not feel
Life is worth living still.

WORDSWORTH AT DOVE COTTAGE

"But Wordsworth's eyes avert their ken
From half of human fate."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

I

Wise Wordsworth, to avert your ken,
From half of human fate.
What is there in the ways of men,
Their struggles, or their state,
To make the calm recluse forswear
The garden path, the fire-side chair,
To journey with the Great?

II

The narrowest hamlet lends the heart
A realm as rich and wide
As kingdoms do, to play its part;
Who reaps not, that hath tried,
More rapture from the wayside flower
Than all the stairs and robes of power
And avenues of pride?

III

Whether we scan it from below,
Or bask in it above,
We weary of life's glittering show;
We tire of all save Love.
As, when fatigued with wood-notes shrill,
We listen with contentment still
To cooings of the dove.

IV

In this low cottage nested near
Mountain and lake, you dwelt;
'Twas here you tilled the ground, 'twas here
You loved, and wrote, and knelt.
Hence, wheresoe'er your kindred dwell,
Your songs sincere our hearts compel
To feel the thing you felt.

V

Glory there is that lives entombed
In spacious-soaring shrine;
A tenement more narrow-roomed
Sufficient is for thine.
A homely temple haply found
Where peasants toil and streamlets sound,
Adorned not, but divine.

VI

Your sacred music still is heard,
When notes profane have died;
Like some familiar home-bred word,
You in our lives abide.
And when with trackless feet we rove
By meadow, mountain, mere, or grove,
We feel you at our side.

VII

Thrice-happy bard! who found at home
All joys that needful be;
Whose longings were not forced to roam
Beyond your household Three:—
Your own proud genius, steadfast, calm,
A wife whose faith was household balm,
And heavenly Dorothy.

VIII

What is it sweetens tasteless Fame?
Makes shadowy Glory bliss?
What is the guerdon poets claim?
What should it be but this?—
A heart attuned to understand,
A listening ear, a loving hand,
A smile, a tear, a kiss!

IX

Leave them but these, and let who will
   Crave plaudits from the crowd,
Its vapid incense, aves shrill,
   And favour of the proud.
The sweetest minister of Fame
Is she who broods upon one's name,
   But calls it not aloud.

X

And this at least, in full, you had,
   From sister, and from wife:
They made your gravest moments glad,
   They havened you from strife;
Hallowed your verse, revered your tread,
Maintained a nimbus round your head,
   And deified your life.

XI

Hence, long as gentle brows shall bend
   Over your rustic page,
Their pious love shall still befriend
   The poet and the sage;
For, when we cross your cottage sill,
Virtue, no less than Genius, will
   Invite the Pilgrimage.

XII

The tallest tower that ever rose
   Hath but a span to soar;
Palace and fane are passing shows,
   But Time will be no more,
When Wordsworth's home no longer leads
Men's far-off feet to Grasmere's meads,
   And sanctifies its shore.

A POET'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

"He dieth young whom the Gods love," was said
By Greek Menander; nor alone by One
Who gave to Greece his English song and sword
Re-echoed is the saying, but likewise he
"Who uttered nothing base," and from whose brow,
By right divine, the laurel lapsed to yours,—
Great sire, great successor,—in verse confirmed
The avowal of "the Morning-Star of Song,"
Happiest is he that dieth in his flower.[1]

Yet can it be that it is gain, not loss,
To quit the pageant of this life before

[1] Note.

ὃν οἱ θεοὶ φιλοῦσιν ἀποθνήσκει νεός.—Menander.

"Whom the Gods love die young was said of yore,
And many deaths do they escape by this:
The death of friends, and that which slays even more,
The death of friendship, love, youth, all that is,
Except mere breath."—*Don Juan*, Canto iv. s. 12.

"The good die first,
But they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket."—*The Excursion*, Book I.

"And certainly a man hath most honour,
To dien in his excellence and flower."
Chaucer, *The Knight's Tale*.

The heart hath learnt its meaning; leave half-seen,
Half-seen, half-felt, and not yet understood,
The beauty and the bounty of the world;
The fertile waywardness of wanton Spring,
Summer's deep calm, the modulated joy
Of Autumn conscious of a task fulfilled,
And home-abiding Winter's pregnant sleep,
The secret of the seasons? Gain, to leave
The depths of love unfathomed, its heights unscaled,
Rapture and woe unreconciled, and pain
Unprized, unapprehended? This is loss,
Loss and not gain, sheer forfeiture of good,
Is banishment from Eden, though its fruit
Remains untasted.

Interpret then the oracle, "He dies young
Whom the Gods love," for Song infallible
Hath so pronounced! . . . Thus I interpret it:
The favourites of the Gods die young, for they,
They grow not old with grief and deadening time,
But still keep April moisture in their heart
May's music in their ears. Their voice revives,
Revives, rejuvenates, the wintry world,
Flushes the veins of gnarled and knotted age,
And crowns the majesty of life with leaves
As green as are the sapling's.

Thrice happy Poet! to have thus renewed
Your youth with wisdom,—who, though life still seems
To your fresh gaze as frolic and as fair

As in the callow season when your heart
Was but the haunt and pairing-place and nest
Of nightingale and cuckoo, have enriched
Joy's inexperienced warblings with the note
Of mellow music, and whose mind mature,
Laden with life's sustaining lessons, still
Gleams bright with hope; even as I saw, to-day,
An April rainbow span the August corn.

Long may your green maturity maintain
Its universal season; and your voice,
A household sound, be heard about our hearths,
Now as a Christmas carol, now as the glee
Of vernal Maypole, now as harvest song.
And when, like light withdrawn from earth to heaven,
Your glorious gloaming fades into the sky,
We, looking upward, shall behold you there,
Shining amid the young unageing stars.

August 6, 1889.

AS DIES THE YEAR

THE Old Year knocks at the farmhouse door.
  October, come with your matron gaze,
  From the fruit you are storing for winter days,
And prop him up on the granary floor,
  Where the straw lies threshed and the corn stands heaped:
  Let him eat of the bread he reaped;
He is feeble and faint, and can work no more.

Weaker he waneth, and weaker yet.
  November, shower your harvest down,
  Chestnut, and mast, and acorn brown;
For you he laboured, so pay the debt.
  Make him a pallet—he cannot speak—
  And a pillow of moss for his pale pinched cheek,
With your golden leaves for coverlet.

He is numb to touch, he is deaf to call.
  December, hither with muffled tread,
  And gaze on the Year, for the Year is dead,
And over him cast a wan white pall.

Take down the mattock, and ply the spade,
And deep in the clay let his clay be laid,
And snowflakes fall at his funeral.

Thus may I die, since it must be,
My wage well earned and my work-days done,
And the seasons following one by one
To the slow sweet end that the wise foresee;
Fed from the store of my ripened sheaves,
Laid to rest on my fallen leaves,
And with snow-white souls to weep for me.

AN APRIL FOOL

I

I SALLIED afield when the bud first swells,
And the sun first slanteth hotly,
And I came on a yokel in cap and bells,
And a suit of saffron motley.

II

He was squat on a bank where a self-taught stream,
Fingering flint and pebble,
Was playing in tune to the yaffel's scream,
And the shake of the throstle's treble.

III

"Now, who may you be?" I asked, "and where
Do you look for your meals and pillow?"
"My roof," he said, "is the spacious air,
And my curtain the waving willow.

IV

"My meal is a shive of the miller's loaf,
And hunger the grace that blesses:
'Tis banquet enough for a village oaf,
With a handful of fresh green cresses.

V

"A plague on your feasts where the dish goes round,
Though I know where the truffles burrow,
And the plover's eggs may, in fours, be found,
In the folds of the pleated furrow.

VI

"And my name? O, I am an April Fool,
So yclept in the hamlet yonder;
For when old and young are at work or school,
I sit on a stile and ponder.

VII

"I gather the yellow weasel-snout,
As I wander the woods at random,
Or I stoop stone-still, and tickle the trout,
And at times, for a lark, I land 'em.

VIII

"But I flick them back ere they gape and pant,
After gazing at gill and speckle.
For why should I keep what I do not want,
Who can fish without hook or heckle?

IX

"Yes, I am an April Fool: confessed!
And my pate grows not wise for scratching;
But I know where the kingfisher drills his nest,
And the long-tailed tits are hatching."

X

Then he leaped to his feet, and he shook his bells,
And they jangled all together,
As blithe as the chime that sinks and swells
For the joy of a nuptial tether.

XI

And, as they chimed, in the covert near
Where ripens the juicy whortle,
The rustling whisper reached my ear
Of a loitering maiden's kirtle.

XII

Whereat he laughed: "I'm an April Fool,
But am jocund withal and jolly,
So long as I have this realm to rule,
And a lass to love my folly.

XIII

"Go and woo, where the deftly fair parade,
The smiles of a fine court lady;
But I will cuddle my rustic maid,
In the pheasant-drives husht and shady.

XIV

"Her cheek is as creamy as milk in June,
And the winds nor chap nor warp it;
We dance, with the blackbird to give the tune,
And with primroses for carpet.

XV

"Her quick-flashing fingers knit the hose
For her little feet neat and nimble;
Her kiss is as sweet as a half-shut rose,
And her laugh like a silver cymbal.

XVI

"She never asks how my fortunes fare,
Nor wonders how full my purse is;
She sits on my knee, and she strokes my hair,
And I tell her my wildwood verses.

XVII

"She has not a gem she can call her own,
But I rest on a sheepfold hurdle,
And, out of the daffodils newly blown,
Entwine her a golden girdle.

XVIII

"And soon I shall have for my nut-sweet girl,
When the May tree is adorning
Its weather-tanned skin with rows of pearl,
A new necklace, night and morning.

XIX

"When shortly we catch the cuckoo's call,
We shall clap our hands to hear him;
For let whom they may his gibes appal,
This April Fool don't fear him."

XX

Then a wind-cloud, hued like a ringdove's neck,
Made the rain run helter-skelter;
The keen drops pattered on bank and beck,
And I crouched in the ditch for shelter.

XXI

But he whistled his love, and he waved his cap,
And the bells all rang together;
"Just fancy!" he cried, "to care one rap
For the whims of wind or weather.

XXII

"Through all the seasons I keep my youth,
Which is more than you town-folk do, sir.
Now, which is the April Fool, in sooth?
Do you think it is I,—or you, sir?"

XXIII

Then the rain ceased slashing on branch and pool,
And swift came the sunshine, after;
And the thrush and the yaffel screamed, "April Fool!"
And the covert rang with laughter.

CELESTIAL HEIGHTS

I

Hail! steep ascents and winding ways,
Glimmering through melting morning haze,
    Hail! mountain herd-bells chiming clear!
Hail! meads and cherry-orchards green,
And hail, thrice hail! thou golden mean,
    The châlet's simple cheer!

II

I leave the highwayed world behind,
And amid pathless pinewoods wind,
    I drink their aromatic air;
Leap with kin feet the leaping stream,
And wake, as from an evil dream,
    To dawn and speechless prayer.

III

Louder I hear the cattle-bells,
Wider the prospect spreads and swells,
    Lakes, mountains, snow-peaks, round me throng;
I veil mine eyes, with awe oppressed,
Then gaze, and with a carolling breast
    Burst into native song.

IV

The moist cool dews are round my feet;
Forests of wild-flowers, simple, sweet,
With honey load each vacant breeze,
Which healing bears upon its wing,
Breathes with an air of more than Spring,
And banishes disease.

V

My limbs their youthful stride regain,
From off me fall fatigue and pain,
I mount more borne on wings than feet;
My blood in faster current flows,
Yet, like stream fed by mountain snows,
Is coolest when most fleet.

VI

And not this common frame alone
Reclaims its youth, remounts its throne;
I feel, as air and sky expand,
That here the spirit, as the flesh,
Grows fragrant, dewy, healthful, fresh,
And like the landscape, grand.

VII

Is it then so? And must the soul,
That unseen wing towards unseen goal,
Disdain the crowded vale's delights,
Its heat unfruitful, vapid noise,
And soaring, solitary, poise
Among celestial heights?

VIII

Even so. And, poised aloft, my soul
Far above human fret and dole
    In empyrean calm abides.
No mortal voice the silence mars;
I hear the singing of the stars,
    And the eternal tides.

IX

The greedy aims, the lean regrets,
The disenchantment Hope begets
    On ravished hearts,—beheld from here,
Like unto hamlet, pasture, stream,
Confused in one indifferent dream,
    Mean and minute appear.

X

Man's feeble fury, trivial hate,
The pains that upon pleasure wait,
    The exhaustion of tumultuous love,
The hopes that dwindle, fears that grow,
All that upheaves the plain below,
    Tranquil, I breathe above.

XI

Yet 'mid these sun-confronting peaks,
The undesisting spirit seeks
    To mount to loftier, rarer height.
Are what we see but toys of sense,
And we who see them but a lens
    Refracting heavenly light?—

XII

—Imperfect mirror, faulty glass,
Who let the pure white rays to pass
        But twist the coloured beams awry,
Belittle all the good we see,
And ill, since of our own degree,
        Absorb, to magnify?

XIII

Who knoweth, or shall answer find?
I hear the rising of the wind,
        More near and full the torrent's plash;
The swaying pine-woods murmur deep,
The lightnings laugh, and, roused from sleep,
        The storm-winds meet and crash!

XIV

From underneath their lurid cowls,
Rossberg 'gainst Rigi frowns and scowls,
        Across Arth's vale that cowers for dread;
And, mustering for their awful goal,
The phalanxed thunders, rumbling, roll
        Around Pilatus' head.

XV

Zug's gentle bosom heaves with fear,
And Küssnachts' waves, late soft and clear
        As maiden's gaze or childhood's kiss,
Wax black as murkiest pool of hell,
When the infernal tempests swell,
        And demons jeer and hiss.

XV.

'Mid such a ferment what is Man?
He sits beneath the rainbow's span,
And contemplates his little state:
He hears the darkness call, and deems
The skies speak to him in his dreams,
And recognise him great.

XVII

Yet not for him the Heavens engage
In their reverberating rage,
For him the ambushed levins fight.
Him?—but a fainter lightning-flash,
Him?—but a feebler thunder-crash,
Ending in deeper night!

XVIII

Lo! unto other lands of air
The elemental furies bear
The roar of unexhausted strife;
And, freed from the sepulchral gloom,
Earth once again, as from the tomb,
Rises to light and life.

XIX

Pilatus frees his rugged head,
Zug's crouching lake, released from dread,
Looks up and smiles with face serene;
And, gazed on by the dying sun,
The phantom snow-crests, one by one,
Glow with transfigured mien.

XX

Dead! And the tender twilight sighs.
Wan wane her cheeks, moist grow her eyes,
She draws her robes of mourning round:
Slowly she lights her widowed lamp,
And listens, through the night-dews damp,
To catch some cheering sound.

XXI

Yet in her loneliness how fair!
There is a sadness in the air
Sweeter than all the chords of joy;
A fragrance, as of spices borne
Unto the tomb of one we mourn,
And can no more annoy.

XXII

Cham's spire, I scarce in heaven descry,
Inverted, in that other sky,
The lake's lit breast, still plain doth glow:
So Soul, that darkly points above,
Shows sure and clear, when glassed by love
In answering heart below.

XXIII

No more the grazing herds I see,
But still their bells chime silvery
The tuneful, if unmeasured peal,
And, as when heard in dewy morn,
From lonely mind and heart forlorn
Their desolation steal.

XXIV

The legions of the starry host,
Each to their high and solemn post
In silent discipline repair,
And, from the unbattlemented sky,
With an intrepid calm defy
The demons of the air.

XXV

And, lo! athwart their ordered lines,
That strange auxiliary shines,
Who wears the bright long-flowing crest;
Weird warrior from another world,
Whose banner shortly will be furled,
Or waved in realms unguessed.

XXVI

Erratic pilgrim! go not yet!
And, each fair planet, do not set!
For once, if only once, O Time!
Stay thine interminable march
Round and still round that hollow arch,
Where æons vainly chime.

XXVII

For when the tide, which unto Heaven
Brings night, 'gainst earth is backward driven
In waves of rising day, ah! then
Me helpless will it bear once more
Unto that thronged but barren shore,
Ploughed by the cares of men.

FELSENEGG

SHELLEY'S DEATH

[" A little while ago, there died at Spezzia an old sailor, who in his last confession to the priest (whom he told to make it public) stated that he was one of the crew that ran down the boat containing Shelley and Williams, which was done under the impression that the rich Milord Byron was on board with lots of money. They did not intend to sink the boat, but to board her and murder Byron."—*Letter to Mr. Trelawny from his Daughter, published in the* " *Times* " *of Wednesday, December* 1, 1875.

WHAT! And it *was* so! Thou wert then
Death-stricken from behind,
O heart of hearts! and they were men,
That rent thee from mankind!
Greedy hatred chasing love,
As a hawk pursues a dove,
Till the soft feathers float upon the careless wind.

Loathed life! that I might break the chain
Which links my kind with me,
To think that human hands for gain
Should have been turned 'gainst *thee*,—

Thee that wouldst have given thine all
For the poor, the sick, the thrall,
And weighed thyself as dross, 'gainst their felicity!

We deemed that Nature, jealous grown,
Withdrew the glimpse she gave,
In thy bright genius, of her own,
And, not to slay, but save,
That she timely took back thus
What had been but lent to us,
Shrouding thee in her winds, and lulling 'neath her wave.

For it seemed meet thou shouldst not long
Toss on life's fitful billow,
Nor sleep 'mid mounds of silenced wrong
Under the clay-cold willow:
Rather that thou shouldst recline
Amid waters crystalline,
The sea-shells at thy feet, and sea-weed for thy pillow.

We felt we had no right to keep
What never had been ours;
That thou belongedst to the deep,
And the uncounted hours;
That thou earthly no more wert
Than the rainbow's melting skirt,
The sunset's fading bloom, and midnight's shooting showers.

And, thus resigned, our empty hands
Surrendered thee to thine,

Thinking thee drawn by kindred bands
Under the swirling brine,
Playing there on new-strung shell,
Tuned to Ocean's mystic swell,
Thy lyrical complaints and rhapsodies divine.

But now to hear no sea-nymph fair
Submerged thee with her smile,
And tempests were content to spare
Thee to us yet awhile,
But for ghouls in human mould
Ravaging the seas for gold,—
Oh! this blots out the heavens, and makes mere living vile!

Yet thy brief life presaged such death,
And it was meet that they
Who poisoned, should have quenched, thy breath,
Who slandered thee, should slay;
That thy spirit, long the mark
Of the dagger drawn in dark,
Should by the ruffian's stroke be ravished from the day.

Hush! From the grave where I so oft
Have stood, 'mid ruined Rome,
I seem to hear a whisper soft
Wafted across the foam;
Bidding justest wrath be still,
Good feel lovingly for ill,
As exiles for rough paths that help them to their home.

SWEET LOVE IS DEAD

Sweet Love is dead:
  Where shall we bury him?
In a green bed,
With no stone at his head,
  And no tears nor prayers to worry him.

Do you think he will sleep,
  Dreamless and quiet?
Yes, if we keep
Silence, nor weep
  O'er the grave where the ground-worms riot.

By his tomb let us part.
  But hush! he is waking!
He hath winged a dart,
And the mock-cold heart
  With the woe of want is aching.

Feign we no more
  Sweet Love lies breathless.
All we forswore
Be as before;
  Death may die, but Love is deathless.

AN AUTUMN-BLOOMING ROSE

I

I FOUND, and plucked, an autumn-blooming rose,
  And shut my eyes, and scented all its savour:
When lo! as in the month the blackthorn blows,
  Lambs 'gan to bleat, and merle and lark to quaver.

II

Flower of my life! inestimably dear,
  Now that its calendar wanes sere and sober,
To me your freshness, turning back the year,
  Makes that seem April others call October.

III

With me 'tis Autumn, and with you 'tis Spring,
  But Love hath brought these seasons sweet together.
Within your leafy life I sit and sing,
  And you with me share wealth of harvest weather.

IV

Thus all things we exchange, and nothing lose:
  Take you life's wisdom, lend to me life's sweetness.
Your vernal voice shall wed my mellow muse,
  And song give youth, and youth give song, completeness.

HYMN TO DEATH

I

WHAT is it haunts the summer air?
A sense of something lately passed away;
Something pleasant, something fair,
That was with us yesterday,
And is no longer there.
Now from the pasture comes no baby bleat,
Nor the frisk of frolic feet
There is seen.
Blossom and bloom have spread their wings, and flown,
And the bosks and orchards green
The rosy flush of childhood have outgrown.
Lapwing and linnet and lark have fledged their brood;
Mavis and merle have gotten their desire;
The nightingale begins to tire;
Even the cuckoo's note hath fitful grown;
And in the closing leafage of the wood
The ringdove now is left to coo alone.

II

Then revel in your roses, reckless June!
Revel and ripen swift to your decay.

But your turn will follow soon,
And the rounding harvest-moon
Avenge the too brief innocence of May.
Yet once again there scents the morning air
The soul of something passed away;
Something precious, something fair,
That was breathing yesterday,
And is no longer there.
It is Autumn, dying, dying,
With her leaves around her lying,
And Winter, beggared heir, unprofitably sighing.
Let her die.
Unto us as unto her
Earth is but a sepulchre,
And the over-arching sky
Neither asks nor wonders why
Those who here are left behind
Season sweet and spacious mind
Fain would save;
Yet with pale visages and streaming tears
Must watch the harvest of the ripened years
Locked in the bootless granary of the grave.

III

Why do you call me hence?
To purge what fault, to punish what offence?
Had I maligned my lot,
Or ever once the privilege forgot
Of being, though the spirit's inward sense,

Mirror and measure of all things that are,
Then it were right, were just,
That, like a falling leaf or failing star,
The winds of Heaven should blow about my dust.
Or had I used the years as waifs and strays,
To build myself a comfortable nest,
Groped life for golden garbage, like the rest,
And, as a lacquey, on the public ways
For private profit hired out my tongue,
Then against death 'twere vain to plead,
Then, then 'twere meet indeed
I should grow silenced, like a bell unrung.
But bear me witness, every Spring that came
Since first with trembling furtive frame
Out of my little crib I crept
While others slept,
Because to me the rising moon
Was more than sleep, or toy, or boon,
That never yet the thrush resumed to sing,
But straight my heart did build, my voice was on the wing;
Found the first primrose gazing frank
From its cradle in the bank,
Harked for the cuckoo days before he called,
Then halted, at his note enthralled.

IV

Why do you beckon to another sphere?
Here was I born,

Am deeply rooted here,
And would not be uptorn.
I want no other fields than these,
No other skies,
No redder dawn to break on bluer seas,
No brighter stars to rise.
Neither do I crave to know
The origin of joy and woe.
I love the doubt, the dark, the fear,
That still surroundeth all things here.
I love the mystery, nor seek to solve;
Content to let the stars revolve,
Nor ask to have their meaning clear.
Enough for me, enough to feel;
To let the mystic shadows steal
Into a land whither I cannot follow;
To see the stealthy sunlight leave
Dewy dingle, dappled hollow;
To watch, when falls the hour of eve,
Quiet shadows on a quiet hill;
To watch, to wonder, and be still.

V

And can it be,
That there will break the day,
For me, for me,
When I no more shall hear the throstle flute;
Not because his voice is mute,
But that my soul sleeps stupefied in clay?

Never! what, never again!
Deep within some silent glen
To make a couch with peace, far from surmise of men?
Never, never more to stand,
Spell-bound in a leafy land,
Lie among the grasses tall,
Hear the yaffel call, and call,
And lazily watch the lazy clouds slow floating over all?
That time and life will be, but I shall ne'er
Find little feet upon the stair,
Feel little arms about my throat,
Hear little gleeful voices float
Upon the wavelets of the summer air.
That I again shall never share
The peace that lies upon an English lawn,
Watch the last lingering planet shining fair
Upon the unwrinkled forehead of the dawn?
Never, never, never more,
When fate or fancy bids me roam,
Lessen with loving thoughts the last long mile
That leads unto my home,
Descry the roses down the casement falling,
Hear the garden thrushes calling,
Behold my dear ones standing at the door,
Void of fear, void of guile,
And hail, as I so oft have hailed before,
The broadening salutation of their smile?

VI

Who will salute me There?
Who, who come forth to greet?
Will Virgil stand upon the golden stair?
Shall I see Spenser's face, and sit at Shakespeare's feet?
Will Galileo with unshrouded gaze
Guide me through the starry maze,
Upon wings that never tire,
Up to the Heaven of Heavens, and higher and ever higher?
If this be so,
Quick let me go!
But ah! pale spectre, paler still you grow.
You would but lure me to the other bank,
To find it blank!
Of all we loved, not one hath e'er come back
To beckon us along the track,
To point the way, to indicate the goal,
And stretch out steadying arms to help the tottering soul.

VII

But wilt thou make this compact with me, Death,
And keep thy bond?
That even if mine be but borrowed breath,
Lent here awhile, to be reclaimed beyond,
And its poor husk be dug into the ground;
Then, though the Future may not find my face,

Nor arms that love me round my neck be wound,
Fair lips that lisp not yet my name shall sound,
  And hearts that beat not yet be my warm dwelling-
    place;
That under trees which have no rootlets now,
But will then be trunk and bough
  And dome of sheltering leaves, sometimes
  A tender tear shall fall upon my rhymes;
  And hearts at secret war with life,
  Or dreaming maid or disillusioned wife,
  Shall my persuasive music bless,
  Shall call me comforter in their distress,
And make me live again in sorrowing loveliness?

VIII

So unto Death I do commend my Spirit,
  And Time which is in league with Death, that they
    May hold in trust, and see my kin inherit,
      All of me that is not clay;
      Embalm my voice and keep it from decay.
      Then I will not ask to stay;—
    Nay, rather start at once upon the way:
    Cheered by the faith that, at our mortal birth,
      For some high reason beyond Reason's ken,
    We are put out to nurse on this strange earth,
      Until Death comes to take us home again.

DEAD!

I

Hush! or you'll wake her. Softly tread!
She slumbers in her little bed.
What do I see? A coffin! Dead?
Yes, dead at break of morning.

II

No, no, it cannot, cannot be!
I know that I can wake her. See!
She only plays at sleep. *Ma mie*,
Kiss me, for it is morning.

III

Look, pretty, look! Within, without,
Snowdrops and hyacinths lie about.
Why don't you clutch them with a shout
Blither than birds of morning?

IV

You used to clap your hands with glee,
When I brought flowers. "Are these for me?"
Now, now, you neither scent nor see
These incense-buds of morning.

V

Do you not know me, pet? Speak! speak!
There is no answer in her cheek.
To find her now where shall I seek?—
Seek in the vanished morning!

VI

What can I do to make her heed?
I am crying, love; I am indeed.
Open your eyes and see. What need
To tease me all the morning?

VII

Look! We will sally forth and play;
Ramble, and never ask our way,
Lessons and tasks all put away,
As though it were not morning.

VIII

We will do all that you desire,
And I will never, never tire
Of romping with you by the fire,
When 'tis no longer morning.

IX

Your favourite tales, oft told before,
I'll tell you, darling, o'er and o'er;
It never shall be bedtime more,
Will you but wake this morning.

X

I will not ask you to sit still ;
You shall be naughty when you will ;
Shall spill my ink and spoil my quill,
And squander all my morning.

XI

Alas ! Alas ! it is no cheat !
Quiet she lies from face to feet !
No smile, no sigh, no hue, no heat,
No earnest of the morning.

XII

Draw high the sheet above her head.
She liked it, so. Dead ? No, not dead.
The angels, hovering round her bed,
Will greet her in the morning.

IMPROMPTU

(On a Miniature, in the possession of Lady Wolseley, of a Beautiful Lady, painted after death, as though she were still alive.)

I

Tell me your race, your name,
O Lady limned as dead, yet as when living fair!
That within this faded frame
An unfading beauty wear.
Were you ever known to fame,
Or, more wisely, chose to be
Lost in love's obscurity?
We may question, gaze, and guess,
You will never answer "yes,"
For your sweet lips are closed by Death's relentlessness.

II

Yes, you were chill before
Some thoughtful hand to us your loveliness bequeathed.
You already then no more

Moved, or spoke, or felt, or breathed,
But an eternal silence wore.
Dank and limp your ample hair,
And your eyelids kept the stare
Of a face that cannot speak;
And, where lived the rose's streak,
There only lingered then the lily in your cheek.

III

Was it your own strange prayer
That you, in death, should be in living garb arrayed,
And your aspect seem as fair,
Fanciful and undecayed,
As when life and love were there?
No! it was no idle whim:
Death was in love with you, and you in love with Him.
And when you, with tender dread,
All to Him surrenderëd,
He took care you should retain
All of life except its pain,
And with unabated charms
Lie fast asleep in your unsleeping lover's arms.

LOVE'S FITFULNESS

You say that I am fitful. Sweet, 'tis true;
But 'tis that I your fitfulness obey.
If you are April, how can I be May,
Or flaunt bright roses when you wear sad rue?
Shine like the sun, and *my* sky will be blue;
Sing, and the lark shall envy me my lay:
I do but follow where you point the way,
And what I feel you doing, straight must do.
The wind might just as well reproach the vane,
As you upbraid me for my shiftings, dear:
Blow from the south, and south I shall remain;
If you keep fixed, be sure I shall not veer.
Nay, on your change my changes so depend,
If ends your love, why then my love must end.

A TE DEUM

I

Now let me praise the Lord,
  The Lord, the Maker of all!
I will praise Him on timbrel and chord;
  Will praise Him, whatever befall.

II

For the Heavens are His, and the Earth,
  His are the wind and the wave;
His the begetting, the birth,
  And His the jaws of the grave.

III

'Tis He that hath made us, not we;
  We were dust and slime of the ground:
He breathed on the dark, and we see;
  He flooded the silence with sound.

IV

Shall I pick and choose for His praise?
  Shall I thank Him for good, not ill?
He is the Ancient of Days,
  And He hews the rocks as He will.

V

So I praise Thee, O Lord, for the good,
  For the ill, for the weal, for the woe,
For the cushat that coos in the wood,
  And the wolves that howl in the snow.

VI

For the close-fitting doors that are barred,
  Lest the vagrant should whine for bread,
And the yawn of the slinking pard
  That hath gorged and surfeited.

VII

For the owl that jibbers and blinks
  In the arches the Flavian planned,
And the stare of the stony Sphynx
  O'er the ribs of the fleshless sand.

VIII

What is there Thou hast done,
  I will not thank for and praise?
Thanks for the sands that are run,
  Thanks for the unborn days.

IX

For the stealthy mildew and blight
  That shows on the mellowing corn,
And the bankrupt that wakes at night
  And weeps o'er the day he was born.

X

For the fears and the years that are null,
  And the hopes Thou dost bring to nought,
And the worm-thridden ways of the skull
  In which Shakespeare thought.

XI

How shall I thank Thee, O Lord!
  For Thy infinite ways and deeds?
For the edge of the cleaving sword,
  And the neigh of riderless steeds:

XII

The murderous glitter and tramp,
  And the lives that are mown like grain,
The cheers of the victors' camp,
  And the clammy sleep of the slain.

XIII

The laurels and loves that await
  The Hero returned from the strife,
And the widows that stand at the gate
  Loveless and lonely for life.

XIV

Thanks for all things that are,
For the fair, the foul, the fell;
Thanks for the Morning-star,
And the nethermost murk of Hell.

XV

For the music of moonlight nights,
And the savour of summer days,
For the swoop of carrion kites,
And the stench of gibbeted jays.

XVI

The soft ripples that laugh in the bay,
The soft shadows that sweep o'er the moor,
And the plunge of the tides at their prey
When they level the homes of the poor.

XVII

Lift up your throats, ye waves!
Swell out your voice, ye hills!
Thank for the chance that saves;
Thank for the flash that kills.

XVIII

For the bliss of a dewy dell
When lover and maiden meet,
And the venal kisses they sell
In the shade of the lamp-lit street.

XIX

For the tumult of hopes and fears
  When the bridegroom steals to his bride,
And the coldness born of the years,
  Though they still lie side by side.

XX

Praise we, praise we the Lord,
  The Lord, the Maker of all!
Praise Him on timbrel and chord;
  Praise Him, whatever befall!

AT DELPHI

I

Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!

II

Where hast thou, Apollo, gone?
I have wandered on and on,
Through the shaggy Dorian gorges,
Down from where Parnassus forges
Thunder for the Phocian valleys;
Where the Pleistus springs and sallies
Past ravines and caverns dread,
Have, like it, meanderëd;
But I cannot see thee, hear thee,
Find thee, feel thee, get anear thee.
Though in quest of thee I go where
Thou didst haunt, I find thee nowhere,
Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!

III

Still no answer comes. . . . Apollo!
Vainly do I call and holloa

Into each Crissœan cleft
Where the last year's leaves are left.
Deem not I have pushed my way
But from stony Amphissà.
I have come from far-off land,
Traversed foam, traversed sand,
From green pastures sea-surrounded,
Where thy phorminx never sounded;
O'er the broad and barren acres
Of the vainly furrowed breakers,
Across mountains loftier far
Than the peaks of Pindus are;
Skirted groves of pine and fir
Denser than lone Tempe's were,
With no selfish tread, but only
I might find thee, lovely, lonely,
Lingering by thy sacred city:
On me wilt thou not have pity?
Sun-god! Song-god! I implore thee!
Glow, and let me pale before thee,
Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!

IV

Fallen tablet, prostrate column,
Solitude and silence solemn!
Half-tilled patches, squalid hovels,
Where life multiplies and grovels—
Is this Delphi, this the shrine
Of the Musagete divine?

This the cavern, this the cell,
Of the Pythian oracle!
Where the tripod, where the altar,
Incense, embassy, and psalter?
Can this pool of cresses be
Cradle of pure Castaly?
From the rock though still it bubbles,
Travels onwards, halts, and doubles,
Where the Muses wont to lave
Limbs as vestal as its wave,
'Mong the flashing waters flashing,—
Gaunt and withered crones are washing.
Not a note of lyre or zittern,
But, below, the booming bittern
Waits his quarry to inveigle,
While o'erhead the silent eagle,
Blinking, stares at the blank sun—
All of thee that is not gone,
Apollo! Apollo!

V

Who art thou, intruder weird!
With the fine and flowing beard?
Whom no snowy robes encumber,
But a habit black and sombre,
Yet in whose composëd eyes
Lurks the light of mysteries.
Priest thou seemest, but not one
Of the loved Latona's son.

In thy aspect is no gladness,
Glance nor gleam of joyous madness,
Only gloom, only sadness.
Underneath thy knotted girdle
Thoughts congeal and passions curdle,
And about thy brow ascetic
Lives nor light nor line prophetic.
Priest, but priest not of Apollo,
Whither wouldst thou have me follow?
Lead but onward, I will enter
Where thy cold gaze seems to centre,
Underneath yon portal dismal,
Into dusk and chill abysmal.
Hast thou pent him? Is He lying
There within, dethroned and dying?
If thou breathest, hear me crying,
"Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!"

VI

No, but here He cannot be,
God of light and poesy!
What are these I see around,
Gloomy upon gloomy ground,
Making wall and roof to seem
Sepulchre of morbid dream?
Visages with aspect stony,
Bodies lean, and lank, and bony,
In whose lineaments I trace
Neither love, nor joy, nor grace:

Youth with limbs disused and old,
Maidens pale, contorted, cold,
Flames devouring, pincers wrenching
Muscles naked but unblenching,
Writhing snakes forked venom darting
Into flesh-wounds, gaping, smarting,
Furies shagged with tresses fell,
Ghouls and ghosts of nether hell!
Priest of beauty! Priest of song!
Aid me, if thou still art strong!
See me! save me! bear me whither
Glows thy light that brought me hither,
Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!

VII

O the sunshine once again!
O to stand a man 'mong men!
Lo! the horrid nightmare pales
In the light of flowing vales,
In the gaze of steadfast mountains,
Sidelong runnels, forward fountains,
Spacious sky, receding air,
Breadth and bounty everywhere.
What if all the gods be dead,
Nature reigneth in their stead.
Let me dream the noon away
Underneath this full-blown bay,
Where the yellow bees are busy,
Till they stagger, drowsy, dizzy,

From the honeyed wine that wells
Up the branches to the cells
Of the myriad-clustered flowers
Dropping golden flakes in showers.
Here reclined, I will surrender
Sense and soul unto the tender
Mingling of remote and close:
Gods voluptuous, gods morose;
Altars at whose marble meet
Downcast eyes and dancing feet;
Awful dirges, glad carouse,
Unveiled bosoms, shaded brows,
Wreathëd steer and tonsured skull,
Shapes austere with beautiful;
Till the past and present swim
In an ether distant, dim,
And the Delphic fumes rise denser
From a silver-swinging censer,
And in one harmonious dream,
Through a heavenly nimbus, gleam
Lovely limbs and longings saintly,
And pale virgins murmur faintly,
"Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!"

VIII

Priest, but priest not of Apollo,
Why dost thou my footsteps follow
From the deep dark shrine down there
To this temple of the air?

What, profaner! wouldst thou lay
Hands upon the sacred bay,
Tearing Daphne limb from limb!
Hast thou, then, no dread of Him?
How? For me? Avaunt, and pass!
I am not fool Marsyas.
Stay! Then to my forehead bind it,
Round my temples wreathe and wind it;
'Chance the Avenger then will come,
Haunt and grot no more be dumb,
But the rills and steeps be ringing,
And a long array come singing,
"Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!"

IX

All in vain! Nor prayer nor taunt
Tempts him back to his loved haunt.
Fretted tablet, fallen column,
Solitude and silence solemn!
He again from Peneus ne'er
Will to Castaly repair;
Never more in cavern dread
Will his oracles be read;
Now I know that Thou art dead,
Apollo!

X

Then like fountain in mine ear
Spake the god aloud and clear:

"Take it! Wear it! Tis for thee,
Singer from the Northern Sea.
If the least, not last of those,
Suckled 'mong the genial snows.
Though the Muses may have left
Tempe's glen and Delphi's cleft,
Wanderer! they have only gone
Hence to murmuring Albion.
Need was none to travel hither:
Child of England, go back thither.
Traverse foam, traverse sand;
Back, and in thy native land
Thou wilt find what thou dost seek.
There the oracles still speak;
There the mounting fumes inspire
Glowing brain and living lyre.
There the Muses prompt the strain,
There they renovate my reign;
There thou wilt not call in vain,
'Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!'"

DELPHI, *April* 1881.

A SNOW-WHITE LILY

I

THERE was a snow-white lily
  Grew by a cottage door :
Such a white and wonderful lily
  Never was seen before.

II

The earth and the ether brought it
  Sustenance, raiment, grace,
And the feet of the west wind sought it,
  And smiled in its smiling face.

III

Tall were its leaves and slender,
  Slender and tall its stem ;
Purity, all its splendour,
  Beauty, its diadem.

IV

Still from the ground it sprouted,
Statelier year by year,
Till loveliness clung about it,
And was its atmosphere.

V

And the fame of this lily was bruited
'Mong men ever more and more;
They came, and they saw, and uprooted
Its life from the cottage door.

VI

For they said, "'Twere shame, 'twere pity,
It here should dwell half despised.
We must carry it off to the city,
Where lilies are loved and prized."

VII

The city was moved to wonder,
And burst into praise and song,
And the multitude parted asunder
To gaze on it borne along.

VIII

Along and aloft 'twas uplifted,
From palace to palace led;
Men vowed 'twas the lily most gifted
Of lilies living or dead.

IX

And wisdom, and wealth, and power,
Bowed down to it more and more :—
Yet it never was quite the same flower
That bloomed by the cottage door.

X

For no longer the night-dews wrought it
Raiment, and food, and grace;
Nor the feet of the west wind sought it,
To dance in its dimpling face.

XI

'Twas pursued by the frivolous rabble,
With poisonous lips and eyes;
They drenched it with prurient babble,
And fed it with fulsome lies.

XII

Thus into the lily there entered
The taint of the tainted crew,
Till itself in itself grew centred,
And it flattery drank like dew.

XIII

Then tongues began words to bandy
As to whose might the lily be.
"'Tis mine," said the titled dandy;
Said the plutocrat, "'tis for me."

XIV

Thus over the lily they wrangled,
  Making the beautiful base,
Till its purity seemed all mangled,
  And its gracefulness half disgrace.

XV

Next they who had first enthroned it,
  And blatantly hymned its fame,
Now, curdling their smiles, disowned it,
  And secretly schemed its shame.

XVI

The lily began to wither,
  Since the world was no longer sweet ;
And hands that had brought it thither,
  Flung it into the street.

XVII

A sensitive soul and tender
  The flung-away lily found :
He had seen it in hours of splendour,
  So he lifted it from the ground.

XVIII

He carried it back to the garden
  Where in olden days it grew,
And he knelt, and prayed for it pardon
  From the sun, and the breeze, and the dew.

XIX

Then the breeze, since it knows no malice,
And the sun that detesteth strife,
And the dew whose abode is the chalice,
Would have coaxed back the lily to life.

XX

But the lily would not waken,
Nor ever will waken more;
And feet and fame have forsaken
Its place by the cottage door.

A RARE GUEST

Love, that all men think they know,
Is a rare guest here below;
But with mortals when it stays,
These are its unerring ways.

I

Love builds secret, half afraid,
In the covert, in the shade,
Fostering, where none know it is,
Solitary gladnesses.
Pry not on its brooding breast,
Lest it should desert its nest.
Then, all seen, you naught can save;
'Twas a cradle;—'tis a grave.

II

Love loves tumult closed with rest,
Spreads its wings and bares its breast
To the unrelenting strain
Of the passionate hurricane.
Though its plumes are frayed like foam,
On it presses still for home,

Upward, slowly—onward, fast—
Till, when it descries at last
Tall tops swaying to and fro,
Down it drops to nest below.
Then the wind that rocks the tree
Is to it a lullaby.

III

Fancy talks itself away,
Love hath ever naught to say,
Save again the hushed caress,
And the sweet long silences,
Glistening gaze of trustful eyes,
Where none questions, none replies
Like, enraptured with its lot,
Star that shines but speaketh not.

IV

Men wax rich by thrifty living;
Love is opulent from giving,
Keeps its store from growing less
By unceasing lavishness;
Richest when it squanders all,
Never ruined prodigal.

V

Lastly, Love, if it could choose,
Would not, as gross worldlings use,

Summon smiles and state to be
Sponsors to felicity.
These it fain would keep apart
From the nuptials of the heart,
Or, if they perforce attend,
Find them rather foe than friend.
For, without the world's disfavour,
Sweet love loses half its savour.

Love, that all men think they know,
Is a rare guest here below;
But with mortals when it stays,
These are its unerring ways.

A LETTER FROM ITALY

I

Lately, when we wished good-bye
Underneath a gloomy sky,
"Bear," you said, "my love in mind,
Leaving me not quite behind;
And across the mountains send
News and greeting to your friend."

II

Swiftly though we did advance
Through the rich flat fields of France,
Still the eye grew tired to see
Patches of equality.
Nothing wanton, waste, or wild;
Women delving, lonely child
Tending cattle lank and lean;
Not a hedgerow to be seen,
Where the eglantine may ramble,
Or the vagrant unkempt bramble
Might its flowers upon you press

Simple-sweet but profitless :
Jealous ditches, straight and square
Sordid comfort everywhere.
Pollard poplars, stunted vine,
Nowhere happy-pasturing kine
Wandering in untended groups
Through the uncut buttercups.
All things pruned to pile the shelf
Nothing left to be itself :
Neither horn, nor hound, nor stirrup,
Not a carol, not a chirrup ;
Every idle sound repressed,
Like a Sabbath without rest.

III

O the sense of freedom when
Kingly mountains rose again !
Congregated, but alone,
Each upon his separate throne ;
Like to mighty minds that dwell,
Lonely, inaccessible,
High above the human race,
Single and supreme in space :
Soaring higher, higher, higher,
Carrying with them our desire,
Irrepressible if fond,
To push on to worlds beyond !
Many a peak august I saw,
Crowned with mist and girt with awe,

Fertilising, as is fit,
Valleys that look up to it,
With the melted snows down-driven,
Which itself received from Heaven.
Then, to see the torrents flashing,
Leaping, twisting, foaming, crashing,
Like a youth who feels, at length,
Freedom ample as his strength,
Hurrying from the home that bore him,
With the whole of life before him!

IV

As, when summer sunshine gleams,
Glaciers soften into streams,
So to liquid, flowing vowels,
As we pierced the mountains' bowels,
Teuton consonants did melt
When Italian warmth was felt.
Gloomy fir and pine austere,
Unto precipices sheer
Clinging, as one holds one's breath,
Half-way betwixt life and death,
Changed to gently-shelving slope,
Where man tills with faith and hope,
And the tenderest-tendrilled tree
Prospers in security.
Softer outlines, balmier air,
Belfries unto evening prayer
Calling, as the shadows fade,

Halting crone, and hurrying maid,
With her bare black tresses twined
Into massive coils behind,
And her snowy-pleated vest
Folded o'er mysterious breast,
Like the dove's wings chastely crossed
At the Feast of Pentecost.
Something, in scent, sight, and sound,
Elsewhere craved for, never found,
Underneath, around, above,
Moves to tenderness and love.

V

But three nights I halted where
Stands the temple, vowed to prayer,
That surmounts the Lombard plain,
Green with strips of grape and grain.
There, Spiaggiascura's child,
By too hopeful love beguiled,
Yet resolved, save faith should flow
Through his parched heart, to forego
Earthly bliss for heavenly pain,
Prayed for Godfrid, prayed in vain.

VI

How looked Florence? Fair as when
Beatrice was nearly ten:
Nowise altered, just the same

Marble city, mountain frame,
Turbid river, cloudless sky,
As in days when you and I
Roamed its sunny streets, apart,
Ignorant of each other's heart,
Little knowing that our feet
Slow were moving on to meet,
And that we should find, at last,
Kinship in a common Past.
But a shadow falls athwart
All her beauty, all her art.
For alas! I vainly seek
Outstretched hand and kindling cheek,
Such as, in the bygone days,
Sweetened, sanctified, her ways.
When, as evening belfries chime,
I to Bellosguardo climb,
Vaguely thinking there to find
Faces that still haunt my mind,
Though the doors stand open wide,
No one waits for me inside;
Not a voice comes forth to greet,
As of old, my nearing feet.
So I stand without, and stare,
Wishing you were here to share
Void too vast alone to bear.
To Ricorboli I wend:
But where now the dear old friend,
Heart as open as his gate,
Song, and jest, and simple state?

They who loved me all are fled;
Some are gone, and some are dead.
So, though young and lovely be
Florence still, it feels to me,
Thinking of the days that were,
Like a marble sepulchre.

VII

Yet, thank Heaven! he liveth still,
Now no more upon the hill
Where was perched his Tuscan home,
But in liberated Rome:
Hale as ever; still his stride
Keeps me panting at his side.
Would that you were here to stray
With me up the Appian Way,
Climb with me the Cœlian mount,
With me find Egeria's fount,
See the clear sun sink and set
From the Pincian parapet,
Or from Sant' Onofrio watch
Shaggy Monte Cavo catch
Gloomy glory on its face,
As the red dawn mounts apace.
Twenty years and more have fled
Since I first with youthful tread
Wandered 'mong these wrecks of Fate,
Lonely but not desolate,
Proud to ponder and to brood,

Satisfied with solitude.
But as fruit that, hard in Spring,
Tender grows with mellowing,
So one's nature, year by year,
Softens as it ripens, dear,
And youth's selfish strain and stress
Sweeten into tenderness.
Therefore is it that I pine
For a gentle hand in mine,
For a voice to murmur clear
All I know but love to hear,
Crave to feel, think, hear, and see,
Through your lucid sympathy.

VIII

Shortly, shortly, we shall meet.
Southern skies awhile are sweet;
But in whatso land I roam,
Half my heart remains at home.
Tell me, for I long to hear,
Tidings of our English year.
Was the cuckoo soon or late?
Beg the primroses to wait,
That their homely smile may greet
Faithfully returning feet.
Have the apple blossoms burst?
Is the oak or ash the first?
Are there snowballs on the guelder?
Can you scent as yet the elder?

On the bankside that we know,
Is the golden gorse ablow,
Like love's evergreen delight
Never out of season quite,
But most prodigal in Spring,
When the whitethroats pair and sing?
Tell me, tell me, most of all,
When you hear the thrushes call,
When you see soft shadows fleeting
O'er the grass where lambs are bleating,
When the lyric lark, returning
From the mirage of its yearning,—
Like a fountain that in vain
Rises but to fall again,—
Seeks its nest with drooping wing,
Do you miss me from the Spring?

IX

Quickly then I come. Adieu,
Mouldering arch and ether blue!
For in you I sure shall find
All that here I leave behind:
Steadfastness of Roman rays
In the candour of your gaze;
In your friendship comfort more
Than in warmth of Oscan shore;
In the smiles that light your mouth,
All the sunshine of the South.

LOVE'S HARVESTING

Nay, do not quarrel with the seasons, dear,
Nor make an enemy of friendly Time.
The fruit and foliage of the failing year
Rival the buds and blossoms of its prime.
Is not the harvest moon as round and bright
As that to which the nightingales did sing?
And thou, that call'st thyself my satellite,
Wilt seem in Autumn all thou art in Spring.
When steadfast sunshine follows fitful rain,
And gleams the sickle where once passed the plough,
Since tender green hath grown to mellow grain,
Love then will gather what it scattereth now,
And, like contented reaper, rest its head
Upon the sheaves itself hath harvested.

WHEN ACORNS FALL

When acorns fall and swallows troop for flight,
And hope matured slow mellows to regret,
And Autumn, pressed by Winter for his debt,
Drops leaf on leaf till she be beggared quite;
Should then the crescent moon's unselfish light
Gleam up the sky, just as the sun doth set,
Her brightening gaze, though day and dark have met,
Prolongs the gloaming and retards the night.
So, fair young life, new risen upon mine
Just as it owns the edict of decay
And Fancy's fires should pale and pass away,
My menaced glory takes a glow from thine,
And, in the deepening sundown of my day,
Thou with thy dawn delayest my decline.

A MEETING

NOVEMBER 19, 1888

QUEEN, widowed Mother of a widowed child,
Whose ancient sorrow goeth forth to meet
Her new-born sorrow with parental feet,
And tearful eyes that oft on hers have smiled,
Will not your generous heart be now beguiled
From its too lonely anguish, as You greet
Her anguish, yet more cruel and complete,
And, through her woe, with woe be reconciled?
Or if this may not be, and all the years
Of love's bereavement be withal too brief
To bring slow solace to still lengthening grief
For loss of One whom distance but endears,
Surely to Both will come some sad relief,
Sharing the comfort of commingled tears.

STAFFORD HENRY NORTHCOTE

Gentle in fibre, but of steadfast nerve
Still to do right though right won blame not praise,
And fallen on evil tongues and evil days [1]
When men from plain straight duty twist and swerve,
And, born to nobly sway, ignobly serve,
Sliming their track to power through tortuous ways,
He felt, with that fine sense that ne'er betrays,
The line of moral beauty 's not a curve.
But, proving wisdom folly, virtue vain,
He stretched his hands out to the other shore,[2]
And was by kindred spirits beckoned o'er
Into the gloaming Land where setteth pain,
While we across the silent river strain
Idly our gaze, and find his form no more.

[1] ". . . Though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues."
Paradise Lost, Book VII. v. 25, 26.

[2] "Tendebantque manus ripæ ulterioris amore."
Æneidos Lib. VI. v. 314.

THE DREGS OF LOVE

THINK you that I will drain the dregs of Love,
I who have quaffed the sweetness on its brink?
Now by the steadfast burning stars above,
Better to faint of thirst than thuswise drink.
What! shall we twain who saw love's glorious fires
Flame toward the sky and flush Heaven's self with light,
Crouch by the embers as the glow expires,
And huddle closer from mere dread of night?
No! cast love's goblet in oblivion's well,
Scatter love's ashes o'er the field of time!
Yet, ere we part, one kiss whereon to dwell
When life sounds senseless as some feeble rhyme.
Lo! as lips touch, anew Love's cresset glows,
And Love's sweet cup refills and overflows.

A FAREWELL TO YOUTH

Ere that I say farewell to youth, and take
The homely road that leads to life's decline,
Let me be sure again I shall not pine
To taste the bliss you bid me to forsake:
That Spring's returning raptures will not wake
Too late repentance for abjuring mine,
Nor the old sweets I pledge me to resign
Behind them leave the bitterness of ache.
Yet is there nothing of one's generous prime
To bear me kindred company to the end,
Some passionate longing, some belief sublime,
Some wrong to right, some failure to befriend?
Leave me but these, I care not where I wend,
But down life's slope go hand-in-hand with Time.

LOVE'S UNITY

How can I tell thee when I love thee best?
In rapture or repose? how shall I say?
I only know I love thee every way,
Plumed for love's flight, or folded in love's nest.
See, what is day but night bedewed with rest?
And what the night except the tired-out day?
And 'tis love's difference, not love's decay,
If now I dawn, now fade, upon thy breast.
Self-torturing sweet! Is't not the self-same sun
Wanes in the west that flameth in the east,
His fervour nowise altered nor decreased?
So rounds my love, returning where begun,
And still beginning, never most nor least,
But fixedly various, all love's parts in one.

NOCTURNAL VIGILS

Why do you chide me that, when mortals yield
To slumber's charm, from sleep I ask no boon,
But from my casement watch the maimëd moon
Fainting behind her ineffectual shield:
Unto the chime by stately planets pealed
My song, my soul, my very self attune,
And nightly see, what none can see at noon,
The runic volume of the sky unsealed?
Haply the hour may come when grateful Night
Will these brief vigils endlessly repay,
And, on the dwindling of my earthly day,
Keep, like her stars, my heavenly fancies bright;
And glorious dreamings, shrouded now from sight,
Dawn out of darkness, not to sleep for aye.

GLEANERS OF FAME

Hearken not, friend, for the resounding din
That did the Poet's verses once acclaim :
We are but gleaners in the field of fame,
Whence the main harvest hath been gathered in.
The sheaves of glory you are fain to win,
Long since were stored round many a household
name,
The reapers of the Past, who timely came,
And brought to end what none can now begin.
Yet, in the stubbles of renown, 'tis right
To stoop and gather the remaining ears,
And carry homeward in the waning light
What hath been left us by our happier peers ;
So that, befall what may, we be not quite
Famished of honour in the far-off years.

CHURCH-DOORS SHOULD STILL STAND OPEN

Church-doors should still stand open, night and day,
Open to all who come for praise or prayer,
Laden with gift of love or load of care,
Nimbused with gold, or flecked with locks of gray,
Mother, or snow-white bride, or pallid clay,
The blithe, the sad, the uncomely as the fair,
Each on his secret errand wending there,
Nor even the mighty and strong be turned away.
And so the poet's heart should ever be
Portal of joy and welcomer of woe,
That makes the deaf to hear, the blind to see,
Open confessional for high and low,
An unshut shrine where all may come and go,
And by their tears an enriched sanctuary.

WHEN RUNNELS BEGAN TO LEAP AND SING

I

WHEN runnels began to leap and sing,
And daffodil sheaths to blow,
Then out of the thicket came blue-eyed Spring,
And laughed at the melting snow.
"It is time, old Winter, you went," she said,
And flitted across the plain,
With an iris scarf around her head,
And diamonded with rain.

II

When the hawthorn put off her bridal veil,
And the nightingale's nocturn died,
Then Summer came forth with her milking-pail,
And hunted the Spring, and cried,
"It is time you went; you have had your share,"
And she carolled a love-song sweet,
With eglantine ravelled about her hair,
And butter-cup dust on her feet.

III

When the pears swelled juicy, the apples sweet,
And thatched was the new-ricked hay,
And August was bronzing the stripling wheat,
Then Summer besought to stay.
But Autumn came from the red-roofed farm,
And "'Tis time that you went," replied,
With an amber sheaf on her nut-brown arm,
And her sickle athwart her side.

IV

When the farmer railed at the hireling slut,
And fingered his fatted beeves,
And Autumn groped for the last stray nut
In the drift of her littered leaves,
"It is time you went from the lifeless land,"
Bawled Winter, then whistled weird,
With a log for his hearth in his chilblained hand,
And sleet in his grizzled beard.

THE END

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